



# THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION  
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

*Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.*

No. 55.

Price, Five Cents.

## BUFFALO BILL'S BONANZA

OR  
THE CLAN OF THE SILVER CIRCLE



BY  
THE AUTHOR OF  
'BUFFALO BILL'

IN A MOMENT LONG WAS UPON HIM, BUT BUFFALO BILL DREW HIS REVOLVER QUICKLY AND FIRED.





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## BUFFALO BILL'S BONANZA:

OR,

### The Clan of the Silver Circle.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

#### CHAPTER I.

##### SAWDUST CITY IN ITS PRIME.

The saloon at the Sinner's Rest, in Sawdust City, was in full blast, and tobacco smoke arose in a heavy cloud above the heads of half-a-hundred gamblers, while others, not engaged in playing cards, mostly from the reason that they were dead broke, sat at tables near the bar enjoying themselves in chatting.

Here a joke was told that elicited shouts of laughter, there a man played upon an accordion, and others sang, while a few leaned against the long bar and drank what suited them best.

The clink of glasses kept up an accompaniment to the untutored music, while the voices of the singers were more in harmony than were the notes of the wheezing accordion.

A score or more were gambling, and at several tables the stakes were large, drawing about them a number of lookers-on interested in the games of theirs.

The saloon was an addition to the tavern proper, on one side of it, of one story, with planked walls and roof, and was quite large.

The light came from half-a-dozen swinging lamps, over the tables and bar, the latter being ornamented with rows of jugs, on which were painted in red letters the names of the contents.

In front of each jug was a bottle, which held "the same," and these latter had to be frequently filled up, as there was a steady drain upon them, from the one marked "Whisky" to that marked "Brandy."

It was hinted that the landlord of the Sinner's Rest bought but one kind of liquor, and that bad whisky, and by a process known only to himself he manufactured from it both rye and bourbon, brandy, gin and rum, while, by diluting alcohol and throwing in some extract of lemon, he made "sherry," which a little black molasses added changed into "old port."

Be this as it may, the barrels under the shelf, which were drawn upon as the jugs went dry, all looked alike, and certainly bore a strong resemblance to whisky casks.

The cigars were cheap and strong, but cost a good deal of money and patience to smoke.

As for the hotel, so called by simple kindness, it



was the best in that wild country, and if one got the best he had no right to complain.

The fare was really not bad, and there were several good rooms in the house, the best of which had been given to Don, the Monte Man, and afterward to the Black Canary, who appeared so mysteriously in the midst of them all, charmed them by her voice, and then disappeared even more mysteriously.

What had become of her had been more than a nine days' wonder, and the denizens of Saw Dust City had kept her memory green.

As she had not reappeared, there was a hunt arranged, and she had been tracked from camp to camp, and thence to the home of the Trapper Parson.

It was found deserted, and there was evidence that there had been a fight there, but with whom could not be discovered.

Where the Trapper Parson, or his daughter, Wild Rose, had gone, no one ever knew, any more than they could find out where the Black Canary and Uncle Solomon, her boy guide, had gone.

They were tracked to the main mountain trail, the Overland stage road, which ran near, but this was the most often traveled highway in the mountains, and all trace was lost there, and the trail had to be given up.

So this but deepened the mystery, as the Trapper Parson and Wild Rose had disappeared too, and certainly the house had not been left as though with the intention of deserting it.

Another mystery arose on these two, and that was that Don, the Monte Man, also failed to put in an appearance in Saw Dust City.

His traps were still at the Sinner's Rest Inn, and the landlord said that he kept his room for him, though there were many to assert that he had been foully dealt with, or voluntarily left the mines.

So these mysteries were talked over around the mining-camps, and neither the Monte Man, Black Canary or Uncle Solomon were forgotten, as time went on, while seldom did a stage come in that the driver was not asked:

"Is thar any one stirrin' up at ther Trapper Parson's cabin?"

The stage trail led by at a point from where the cabin came in view for quite a while, but at a distance, and the drivers got so that they always looked in that direction.

But the same response had to be made each time: "Still deserted, pards."

Thus two years glided by, and Saw Dust City had not solved the mystery of those mysterious disappearances.

The mining-camp had grown some, but there had been no rich leads struck of late, so that few outsiders had been drawn thither with the hope of making a sudden fortune.

There were some who had dug riches out of the earth, and gone back home to cast off their mine suits and wild ways, and spend their days in peace and plenty, and others had stepped into their places, with a few additional settlers, and thus the settlement had increased a little and the dwellers there hoped some day to see Saw Dust City a famous city of the mountains.

Bunco, the landlord of the Sinner's Rest, was the money-making man of the camp, which had been given the name of Saw Dust City on account of a sawmill near, which furnished sawdust for the paving of the streets in the rainy season.

What Bunco's other name was no one knew, or how he received that strange one; certainly it was never given him in baptism.

He was a hard-faced man, clean-shaven, dressed in black, and did not look unlike an itinerant minister.

He had a cynical look, but an obsequious air, and assumed to speak in the dialect of the border.

Beneath his long-tailed black coat he carried a pair of revolvers, and he knew how to use them, as everyone was aware who had seen him tried.

With his tavern turning out more than any other mine, his ranch up in the mountains paying handsomely, the landlord of the Sinner's Rest had become the mogul, as it were, of Saw Dust City.

Those he kept about him as servants were more than that in reality, for his "help" was really a guard, and his inn a citadel, where he could bid defiance to the most to the town, supplied as he was with provisions and a young arsenal in the way of arms, he having a room especially for firearms.

As for Saw Dust City proper, it boasted of half a dozen stores, the largest and best of which belonged to Landlord Bunco, and adjoining the hotel, with which it was connected by a board passageway leading into the landlord's private rooms.

It was presided over by a ruffianly-looking man who answered to the name of Red Tom, both on account of his deadly deeds and his fiery red hair and face.

To aid him in selling the goods Red Tom had a young man who looked as though he had the complexion, for he was pale-faced and slender, with large, dark, lustrous eyes that were very expressive in fact, he was called Deer-Eye Dick, on account of his eyes, and he was really a very handsome young man.

He devoted himself to his duties, left the store seldom, and kept aloof from all associates; but wore a navy six upon each hip, and, mild-mannered as he was, he had been known to send a bullet straight through the brain of a ruffian one day who sought to bully him, and had cleared the store of several occasions of men who sought to make trouble.



It was to this town that, many years ago, on a summer evening a stranger rode up.

Landlord Bunco happened to come out of his saloon into his office just as the horseman rode up.

He saw a tall man, with great broad shoulders, a physique of a Hercules and an Apollo combined, and clad in buckskin pants, tucked in cavalry boots, upon which jingled massive spurs, a blue hunting-shirt, a corduroy jacket, under the skirt of which peeped out a pair of revolvers, while a large bowie was visible thrust in his belt in front, and very convenient to his right hand.

A large-brimmed slouch hat was upon his head, hopped up upon one side with a gold star.

His face was as handsome as an Adonis, and yet full of manliness, while a dark mustache shaded his resolute mouth, and his dark-brown hair hung in waving masses below his shoulders.

With a quick, firm tread he advanced to the office desk, carrying a repeating rifle across his arm, and asked in a pleasant way of Room Key Johnny, the clerk, who was a large and powerful fellow, the "bouncer" of the Sinner's Rest:

"Can I strike a camp-ground in your shanty tonight, pard?"

"I guesses so, ef you hain't over pertic'ler an' will bunk in with several other pilgrims," was the surly answer.

"Well, I am a trifle particular, and wish a room alone, and that says so," and he tossed a gold twenty-dollar piece upon the desk.

"You can't have no room all alone, even if yer pes plank down yer gold," said Room Key Johnny.

"You know best, pard, as to what you can do, while I know there is no law against my looking elsewhere."

"Hold on, pard; maybe we kin fix you, for you looks like a gent as was used ter ther best," and Bunco stepped forward.

"I have had the best and the worst, my friend; but medium will do me just now, as I am a long way from home, only don't put me in the pig-pen, or in jail, and let me pick my company," said the visitor, in an off-hand way that was natural to him.

"I'll give him the Don's room, Johnny," said the landlord.

"There, Johnny, the cut of your face told me you were playing it on me about not having a room," and, turning to Bunco, he continued:

"I thank you, sir, and I may be some days with you, as I have come here on a prospecting trip, and am hungry as a bear, so if you have anything left over from supper I would be delighted."

"You shall have a good supper, sir, but will you write your name on the register?"

"Give me your autograph album, Johnny," said the stranger, and, as the huge clerk threw the register down, he seized a pen and hastily and skillfully

sketched a buffalo, after which he wrote the name "Bill," following it with the letters "U. S. A."

The clerk glanced at it, and said in his sulky way: "This hain't no sketch-book ter paint in."

"Anything to please you, Johnny," was the cool response, and with a quick movement of his hand Buffalo Bill tore the leaf from the book.

"Hold on thar! You'll get bounced, young feller," cried Room Key Johnny, and he leaned over and grasped the arm of the scout in his big hand.

In an instant he staggered back and fell in a corner, sent there by a blow from the scout's fist, planted directly between the eyes.

"Hands off, Johnny," said the scout, and he stood his ground as the clerk slowly arose, his face bleeding from the stinging blow.

Bunco had merely stepped to the door of the dining-room to order supper, so had seen and heard all, and he felt that the clerk had provoked it, while he was surprised at the easy manner in which the stranger had sent him to earth.

He knew that the large man, who had the boyish name of "Johnny," with the prefix of Room Key, on account of his wearing a bunch of keys at his belt, was a most dangerous man to offend, and he felt there would be trouble.

He had engaged "Johnny" on account of his great muscular strength, and his bulldog courage, which was mixed with a great deal of bravado.

In fact, the clerk was most awe-inspiring to the frequenters of the Sinner's Rest, and was the right man in the right place.

Of his antecedents nothing was known, or cared.

He wrote a good hand, kept the books correctly, made a good clerk, an excellent "bouncer," and was a power in the tavern against servants and guests alike, who did not care to conform to the slight discipline of the establishment.

He had glanced at Buffalo Bill on entering, and determined to make him feel his importance.

He had "tried it on," to use a slang of the camps, and had gone headlong into the corner for his pains.

He rose slowly, amazed, dazed and livid with fury.

He arose, with his hand upon a revolver; but before Bunco could interfere, the scout sprang over the railing into the office, and the revolver he held in his hand covered the burly clerk before he had time to draw his weapon.

"Don't get sassy, Johnny, but put up that iron!" came the low command.

"You've got me under cover," growled the clerk.

"And, Johnny, I don't wish any funny business from you."

"I came here in peace, to stop a few days and enjoy myself, and I don't wish to have to declare war, for, if I do, the coroner will have to sit on you, sure."

"Let us be friendly, and I'll stand the wine, as soon



as I have had a bit to eat, and maybe you can make a few dollars out of me.

"What do you say, shall it be peace or war?"

Johnny was a strategist, and he saw that it was necessary for him to say peace, so he said:

"All right, pard, I don't want no trouble with yer, and so I declar' ther game atween us off, and thar's my hand on it."

"Sensible Johnny! Now we can be friends—What, landlord, have you been looking on at our merry-making?" and Buffalo Bill turned to Bunco.

"Yas, I seen it all, and I do say it is the first time I ever seen my clerk hedge."

"Your clerk has a great big head, landlord, and I like him, so we are to be friends; but how about that little supper, for I hav'n't had the photograph of a meal all day."

"It's ready, so come in."

"See you later, Johnny," said Buffalo Bill, and he strode toward the dining-room after his host, though his head was slightly turned and out of the corner of his eye he saw the clerk, so that a movement of his that was hostile would have met with quick action on the part of the scout.

Buffalo Bill was delighted with his supper, for Bunco had ordered the best, and he enjoyed a substantial meal, after which he went to the office and the clerk showed him to his room.

"This is a pleasant room, Johnny, but it seems to have been headquarters for some one else."

"Don, the Monte Man, had it, and arter he left ther landlord put ther Black Canary inter it, but her stay were short."

"Ah! and who was Don, the Monte Man?"

"A Mexican pilgrim as was a boss on keerds, and spent his dust free."

"I see; is he not here now?"

"No; hasn't been for about two year."

"Got rich and left the mines, I suppose?"

"No; he went off one day, ter be gone a short time, and hasn't put in an appearance since."

"Them is his things yonder, and thet's his pictur'."

"I see; but whose picture is this?"

"Ther Black Canary, for she left a trunk here, and Bunco found that pictur' in it, so hung it up thar."

"Of course you won't meddle with them things o' ther Don and ther Black Canary, for we don't let this room?"

"Oh, no, Johnny; I take only that which is my own; but who was this Black Canary?"

"A gal, or a woman, for she seemed about twenty-five, or so."

"She come here on the stage from Hel'na one day, and Bunk give her this room."

"Then she begun ter sing and she jist made ther water run out o' many a eye among ther boys."

"Whisky tears, I guess."

"Waal, ef they was, they was squar', an' ther boy hoped she'd stay."

"But she come here on ther trail o' some one she called Carter Creighton, and next day she bought horse, took a boy as a guide, one we called Uncle Solomon, and Nick's Kid, for he was a rare young 'un, and off they went ter look up ther feller she was a-huntin' fer."

"Did they find him?"

"They hain't found th'rselves, fer nobody in Sa Dust has seen 'em since."

"Lost?"

"Dunno, pard; but they didn't tarn up, and th' boys went on a hunt fer 'em; but all they could find were thar trail leadin' to ther cabin o' a old Trapp Parson, and thar had been warm work thar, but nobody knew what; but it were supposed ther road agents had tackled 'em, fer ther trail from ther cabin went toward ther Overland, and from thar I guessed toward the wild mountain kentry."

Buffalo Bill seemed indifferent, but he heard every word, and casually remarked:

"Maybe the road-agents got the Don with a woman and the boy?"

"I dunno; but ther Don left ther night ther Black Canary arrived."

"Why do you call her the Black Canary, for the picture shows a very lovely face of a white lady?"

"She were dressed in deep black, veil and all, and thet are why ther boys called her black, and she c' outsing a canary bird and give him odds."

"And who was the boy, you say?"

"Give it up, pard, fer he was a young 'un nobody knew anything about."

"He lived by hisself in a haunted cabin on the ridge, rode a wild mustang thet would fight like wildcat, and ther boy could shoot ter kill when nabe, while he knew every trail around these camps."

"And he was the lady's guide?"

"Yas."

"Well, Johnny, you have quite entertained me, assure you, and as soon as I have put a little plaster of court-plaster on that cut on your face we will in and have the best the house affords in the way of something to drink."

"We has champagne, but it's twenty a bottle of dust."

"We'll drink a bottle of that, Johnny, to cement our friendship," answered Buffalo Bill, and, having dressed the cut which his fist had made in the man's face, the two went into the saloon together, Rocky Key Johnny having seemingly forgotten that he had at last met his master.



## CHAPTER II.

## BEATEN AT HIS OWN GAME.

When Room Key Johnny entered the saloon of the Sinner's Rest, many glanced at him, and there the look would have ended, but, accompanied by a person like Buffalo Bill, a general hum followed the look.

The scout was certainly a most striking looking personage, and he walked to the bar with the air of one who did not know that he was the center of scores of eyes.

"Come, Johnny, you will drink champagne, I believe," he said, in his free-and-easy way, and the surprised bartender got out a bottle of that sparkling wine, and set up two tumblers to drink it out of.

Though a good server of liquors, he was out of his element where champagne was concerned and was going to draw the cork with a corkscrew, when Buffalo Bill said:

"Let me open it, pard."

As the cork flew into the air with a loud report, a dozen men sprung to their feet, for, engaged in gambling and unused to hearing champagne popping at the Sinner's Rest, they thought it was the crack of a revolver.

This centered the eyes of all upon Buffalo Bill, and queries went around as to whom he could be, for, though his name was a byword around every camp-fire, he was personally known among the mining-camps to but few.

A laugh followed the act of those who had sprung up, and, unheeding the presence of others, the scout touched his glass to that of the clerk, and they drank down the sparkling wine.

Having done this, Johnny led his guest around the saloon, seemingly proud at introducing a stranger who attracted such universal attention.

At length they stopped over by a table where four men were busy in a game for considerable money, and Buffalo Bill took a position by one to which the clerk seemed to direct him.

The man was as large as Room Key Johnny, of a powerful frame, wore a red shirt, black pants, stuck in his boot-tops, and carried four revolvers in his belt, and no knife.

His face was coarse, savage and that of a pronounced ruffian, and he was a successful and dangerous gambler.

When he entered a room and invited men to be his companions in a game of cards, few were wont to decline, some being willing to take the chance of winning rather than the prospect of offending the solicitor by a refusal, and even were willing to lose rather than quarrel with Iron Grip, as the man was called.

He had come into the mines some years before, and his occupation was gambling, and woe be unto

the man he caught cheating him, while he was always wont to say if he was caught playing a false game he would make no resistance to being shot.

He had caught, or pretended to catch, several players cheating him, and, after his warning cry of "Look out for Death," he was wont to draw and fire.

Others were quick with their weapons, too, but somehow Iron Grip always got his revolver leveled first, and he seldom missed his aim.

This was the man by whose side Buffalo Bill had halted, while Johnny went around and stood so as to face him.

Between Johnny and Iron Grip there seemed to be a close friendship, and, seeing the clerk, the gambler nodded.

He soon after glanced up at Buffalo Bill, and a moment after frowned, threw down a wrong card, and the game went against him.

The next game was also against him, and, looking up angrily at the scout, he said:

"Look here, Dandy, git one side, for you give me bad luck, or you is spotting my hand and givin' it ter ther others."

"I will stand one side; yes, for you are not a pleasant brute to be near; but if you say that I would be guilty of giving away to others your hand, you lie!"

The words came cutting, distinct, and all near heard them.

And all expected to see Iron Grip spring upon the scout, whom they were assured could not know who the gambler was, to thus answer him, while Johnny said in a whisper:

"Don't make him mad, pard."

The scout smiled, while, strange to say, the gambler did not spring upon him, or reply to his remark, but went on with his game.

But greater interest suddenly became centered around that table, as those who knew the gambler, and beheld the scout, felt that perhaps he might resent an insult which the ruffian was sure to give before long.

Again did the gambler lose, and, looking up at Buffalo Bill, he said:

"You are a bird of ill-omen, Dandy, and I want you to git, and quick, too."

The scout did not change color, as he turned to Room Key Johnny and asked, quietly:

"Is there any law against my being here, Johnny?"

"Nary law as I knows on, only when Iron Grip says anything he means it, and I guess you had better git out ter save trouble."

"Pard Johnny, I think I'll stay, and I don't care to be driven out, nor do I intend to be."

A breathless silence followed the words, and all looked at Iron Grip.

He smiled in a way that resembled the grin of a wolf, and, contrary to all expectation, said:



"Pard, you has grit, and I want ter shake yer hand."

Buffalo Bill was never a man to seek trouble.

He knew the border as no one else knew it, and he was aware that if he showed fear it would be his death-knell.

Fear he did not know the meaning of, and yet he wished to avoid trouble, for he saw that it was being forced upon him as a stranger, to add to the capital of the man of the Iron Grip.

When, therefore, the gambler held forth his hand, the scout was willing to take it, and there drop the matter, so he grasped the horny hand of the desperado.

It was a mistake, for Iron Grip had sought that opportunity to show his strength, and, without rising, he gave the scout a sudden pull, which, unprepared as he was, nearly drew him upon the table.

Many laughed, and, realizing at once the game of the gambler, Buffalo Bill, with a lightning-like rapidity of movement for which he is famous, recovered himself in a second and dealt the man a blow square in the face that staggered him, and caused him to release his grip on the right hand of the scout.

A yell burst from many lips in chorus, for they saw a tragedy ahead, and they wanted just something of that kind to whet their appetites.

Had not Iron Grip been sitting down the blow would have floored him; but he was strong as an ox, and he rose quickly, at the same time trying to get his hand upon one of his revolvers.

Buffalo Bill saw this, however, and he gave him a terrific blow upon the arm that dropped it to his side benumbed, and then, seizing him in a clutch which showed Iron Grip that he was the master, he slapped his face right and left with stinging blows and hurled him into a corner.

Unheeding the yells that arose upon all sides, Buffalo Bill stepped over to the now limp form, for the man was stunned by the blows rained upon him, and disarmed him, handed the four revolvers to the bartender, with the quiet remark:

"Keep this arsenal for that gentleman, who will doubtless wish to fire off a salute when he feels better."

Then the scout walked quietly from the saloon, followed by ringing cheers, while Room Key Johnny was besieged upon all sides with the question:

"Who is yer pard, Johnny?"

"Durned ef I know," said Johnny, who really had not caught at the scout's name from the buffalo he had drawn and the four letters he had written after it.

Bunco had been in the saloon and had seen it all, and he was not sorry to see Iron Grip punished, as the terror of the man kept many from playing cards, and the landlord got his percentage upon each game won.

It did not take Iron Grip long to recover his scattered senses, and, rising slowly to his feet, he passed his huge hand across his eyes, as though striving to recall what had happened.

"What are it, Johnny?" he asked, as he saw the clerk standing near.

"He licked yer, Iron, thet are it," was the reply.

"It's a lie!" he said, in a thoughtful kind of way, as though not exactly sure that it was not the truth.

"Waal, he are puttin' up in this hotel, and I kin call him back ef yer wishes ter see him."

Iron Grip cast a hasty glance toward the door, and there was some anxiety in it, too; but, missing his weapons, he said, savagely:

"Whar's my guns?"

"He took 'em, an' giv 'em ter Rum Charlie," said the clerk, alluding to the bartender, who was known by that not inappropriate cognomen.

"Here they is, Iron Grip," sung out Rum Charlie, who was afraid of the desperado, even unarmed.

The gambler took them and replaced them in his belt, while Johnny said:

"He said as how yer might wish ter fire off a salute when yer got 'em."

"Ef he comes back I'll fire a salute, you bet," growled the desperado.

"I'll call him," said Bunco, walking toward the door, and, with a revolver in each hand, the gambler stood around the corner of the bar, awaiting the coming of the scout from the hotel entrance.

But Landlord Bunco did not return with his guest as was expected by all, and hoped by many.

He found the scout in his room, and he went there to have a talk with him, for he realized that he had no ordinary personage for his guest.

"Ah, landlord, come in," said the scout, as he saw Bunco follow his knock.

And Bunco saw that the scout was ready to greet a foe, if such had entered, for his hand was upon his hip.

"I hope I don't intrude, sir," said the landlord, in his obsequious way.

"No, indeed, for I am glad to see you, so sit down," and Buffalo Bill motioned to a seat on the other side of the table at which he sat.

Bunco dropped into the seat and said in a flattering way:

"Well, sir, you certainly possess wonderful strength, for you handled Iron Grip easy."

"He should have kept his hands off of me, for I do not like it, and that is why I hit your clerk."

"Yaas, and you give it ter him slick, too, while how yer made it up with Johnny I doesn't know, fer he ain't one ter fergive and fergit an injury."

"Oh, Johnny's all right, and if your friend, Iron Grip, is not satisfied he can get more of the same sort, for I keep a supply on hand for just such bullies as he is."



"I guess he don't want any more of that sort, but he's now waitin' for you ter come inter ther saloon and try it on with weepsons."

"I shall not seek him, and he must keep out of my way."

"He's a dangerous man with a gun, stranger."

"So am I!"

The words were quietly said, and with not an atom of bravado in them.

They simply were the truth, and the scout knew what he could do, for he had been tried too often.

Bunco read the words as they were meant, and, gazing into the face of the man, he saw that he was right, for he looked it.

"Waal, pard, yer keep yer eyes open while yer is here, fer Iron Grip will be round when yer least expects it."

"Thank you, landlord, I will take your advice; but I came here to pass a few days, and mostly to see you, and I don't intend to be run off by any one or a dozen desperadoes such as is that ruffian I punished."

"Waal, I'll be glad ter entertain yer as long as yer remains in Saw Dust; but yer hasn't told me yer name?"

"Perhaps this will introduce me?" was the quiet reply, and Buffalo Bill drew up the sleeve of his left arm and revealed a silver band about the wrist.

"Ther Silver Circle!"

The cry came in surprise from the lips of the landlord, and he glanced at the silver band, and then at the scout.

"Yes, I see you recognize it," Buffalo Bill said, calmly.

"I sh'u'd say so; but is yer straight from the mountains?"

"Yes; I did not tarry long on the way."

"And ther pards?"

"They are all right, and I came for supplies for them."

"Ah, yes; I'll give you them all right, and suppose yer has a pack-horse with yer?"

"No, I'll have to get one here."

"All right, pard; I kin supply yer, so just say when yer wishes ter go."

"I think I shall start back soon, and——"

A knock upon the door caused the scout to stop in what he was saying and call out:

"Come in!"

As he did so Bunco noticed that his hand again dropped upon his revolver.

Room Key Johnny entered, and said:

"Bunco, thar's a man here from ther mountains ter see yer!"

"Who is he, Johnny?" asked the landlord, who seemed always suspicious when he was wanted.

"I dunno, but he wears ther Silver Circle."

"Ah!" and Bunco hastily left the room, while Buffalo Bill said, calmly:

"Now, I'm in for it."

Buffalo Bill had come to Saw Dust City on a secret mission. He had just rescued Rose Ripley, a young girl who had been kidnaped years before, from a band of outlaws known as the Clan of the Silver Circle.

This band lived in the mountain range known as the Haunted Mountains in a secret den of their own. They were miners as well as outlaws and highwaymen, and scared off other miners from entering the hills by masquerading as ghosts.

They were in the custom of sending to Bunco for provisions, using as messengers a white horse and dog, who had been trained to make the journey alone and at night.

Buffalo Bill had captured these Dumb Pardes, and the horse had led him to the hut in which Rose Ripley was kept a prisoner. He restored her to her grandfather, the Trapper Parson, who had been searching alone among the hills for her when Buffalo Bill had gone to his assistance.

Bill suspected that the leader of the outlaws, Don, the Monte Man, as he was known, had other prisoners in his keeping.

A beautiful woman, known for her voice as "the nightingale" had come from the East two years before and had entered the Haunted Hills with a boy known as Uncle Sol, whom she had hired as a guide.

The pair had disappeared as if by magic, and Buffalo Bill had decided to find out if they had been captured by the Clan of the Silver Circle.

He had left the Trapper Parson in the hills, together with Toby, a negro scout, and had gone to Saw Dust City, with the intention of finding out from Landlord Bunco other particulars about the Clan of the Silver Circle before he made his attack upon it.

In order to deceive the landlord he had placed upon his wrist a silver circle, the badge of the Clan, which he had taken from the wrist of one of the outlaws who had attacked him and who had fallen a victim to his unerring rifle.

And so when Bunco had left the room in order to see a member of the Clan who had just arrived he felt himself in a ticklish position.

"Now, I'm in for it!" he muttered, with the greatest coolness.

### CHAPTER III.

#### TWO OF A KIND.

When Landlord Bunco went out of Buffalo Bill's room at the Sinner's Rest to see the person whom his clerk told him had arrived to see him, he found at the office a man whose appearance indicated that he was a miner.

He wore a red flannel shirt, a slouch hat and buckskin leggings tucked into his top-boots.



He carried at his back a rifle and in his belt the two revolvers and bowie, without which a miner's outfit was by no means complete.

The man looked jaded, as from a hard trip, and his face was a trifle anxious in expression; but it was stamped from forehead to chin with a look of villainy that no one could mistake, not even the most casual observer of human nature.

As the landlord approached him the stranger said: "Ho, pard; how are yer?"

"Why, Fanshaw, it's you, is it?" said Bunco, grasping his hand.

"It looks like me, don't it, pard?"

"Yes; you do look nat'ral; but what's up?"

"A heap; so come somewhar and I'll tell yer, fer I hes a letter fer yer."

The landlord led the man into his own quarters, and said:

"When did yer leave?"

"Jist sixteen hour ago, and I hes rid hard; but here's a letter for yer."

Bunco took the letter and read it, his face expressing surprise the while, and then he said:

"Fanshaw, I got this order the cap'n sends fer by his other messenger, and were talking to him when you come.

"But what does it mean thet thar is them on yer trail who has been pressin' yer, as ther cap'n says?"

"Waal, thar is them in the mountains as don't skeer easy as other folks, and they is huntin' our trail, and, bein' short o' men, ther cap'n has writ yer jist what he wants yer ter do."

"He don't mean thet I shall find anything in ther mountains 'ceptin' them as he wishes me ter hunt?"

"That's all?"

"And then git out?"

"Jest so."

"Waal, it can be did, I guess; but how many men is it thet camps on yer trail up thar?"

"Three."

"Them hain't many."

"They is more than you thinks, pard, fer thar is one as is a holy terror and means business from ther jump, and his pards hain't no slouches, ef one is a nigger."

"A nigger?"

"Fact; and a sojer."

"And who are t'others?"

"Ther old Trapper Parson, and one o' ther men who knows him says ther other is Buf'ler Bill."

"Lor' no!"

"Fact."

"Waal, I doesn't know thet man, but ef he are what they say he is, then he hain't one ter fool with." "Thet's why I says three are a good many, when he are one."

"Thet's so; but you are sart'in?"

"I tell yer what Jake says, and he were a soldier,

yer know, ontill he desarted, and he knows Buf'ler Bill well, and he seen him."

"What's he doin' thar?"

"Now, pard, he are jist campin' thar fer business."

"I see, and ther cap'n wants him tuk in?"

"Yes, and t'others."

"I see; but he hain't able ter do it himself?"

"He hes other work fer ther men."

"I see; waal, I guess I kin fix it; but one o' your men are already here."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know his name, Fanshaw, but he come early in ther evening, and he hes made himself quite at home, fer he licked Room Key Johnny, my clerk, and cleaned out Iron Grip in ther neatest style."

"Ther Old Nick yer says! But who is he?"

"I don't know, but I guess you kin place him when yer sees him."

"You bet; but if he's one of our men he hev skipped while on duty."

"No; he brought thet same order from ther cap'n that you hes, though no letter."

"Pard, thar is some mistake about this, and I guesses you has been tuk in."

"I guess not, fer he wears the silver circle."

"Ther he are o. k.; but whar is he?"

"In his room, whar I was talking to him when you come."

"And he hes cleaned out Johnny and ther Iron Grip?"

"Well, he did, most beautifully, and I wasn't sorry in either case."

"Ther fact is, Room Key feels his importance, and he jist puts on airs when strangers come, and he did su'thin' Silver Circle didn't like, and all of a sudden I seen Johnny flying backward inter a corner."

"But ther stranger made it up with him, though it are my opinion Johnny hes got it in fer him, and they hed a bottle o' champagne together and then went ter watchin' Iron Grip and some others play."

"I seen Johnny makin' signs ter Iron Grip about ther stranger, and it wasn't long afore ther' was a word or two, and then come an earthquake."

"It was done awful quick, and Iron Grip didn't have no time ter hit or ter draw, and he went down hard, while ther stranger tuk his guns away from him and give 'em ter Rum Charlie, arter which he walked out and come to his room."

"Then Iron Grip got brave and said he wanted ther stranger ter come back, and I come in ter tell him, when I found he were one o' ther Silver Circle."

"Waal, he is a boss; but I can't place him, Bunco, though if he wears ther circle he are all right."

"Waal, we'll go into his room and see him."

"Done," and the two men arose and went to the room of Buffalo Bill.



But their knock brought no response, and, opening the door with his key, the landlord saw that it was vacant.

## CHAPTER IV.

SILENCED.

Soon after Bunco left Buffalo Bill to see to the stranger the scout arose, looked carefully at his weapons and left the room.

He stepped out of the hotel upon the piazza, going by the office, where Room Key Johnny had installed a Chinese in his place for a while, as he had gone into the saloon.

Glancing through the window, Buffalo Bill saw Iron Grip coming toward the outer door, and he stepped back in the shadow.

As the man stepped out upon the piazza he turned back and called out:

"I'll find him yet, pard, and then you'll see a cirkis, I promises you."

Then he banged to the door, and walked toward the steps.

"Git, sir; git lively!"

One glance did the bully cast behind him, and he saw his enemy, with revolver leveled, and with a bound, he sprang from the piazza to the ground and dashed down the street, evidently expecting a shot.

With a laugh at the flight of the desperado, Buffalo Bill entered the saloon.

At his coming a hush seemed to fall upon all; but, unheeding it, he walked over to a corner and took his seat at a table, his back against the wall, and in such a position that no one could get behind him, while his eyes commanded all in the room.

He seemed interested in a game of cards near, and watched them with the air of a man who had no thought of anything else.

But when Buffalo Bill had discovered there was another man who was wearing the silver circle besides himself, he felt, as he said, that he was "in for it."

If trouble came he meant to meet it half-way, and he desired to be where there were others, and not alone in his own room.

So he sought the saloon where the crowd was, and all was going in full blast.

He expected to find Iron Grip there awaiting him, as the landlord had said, so he went on the piazza to enter from another door that he might not be surprised, but surprise his enemy.

This he had done most satisfactorily, sending the bully flying up the street in fright.

Then he entered the saloon and sought a convenient locality in which to stand at bay if it came to serious trouble.

He knew that all eyes were upon him, and admiringly, after his defeat of Iron Grip, whom physically

not one of them present would have faced, though with weapons there were several who would have stood their ground without dread.

Seeing how matters stood, and that he might need the aid of some present, he took the sure way to their hearts, for he got up, and, approaching the bar, said in his off-hand way:

"Gentlemen, I'm so dry I'll catch afire if I don't have a drink.

"Will you join me, and I mean *all*?"

They arose as one man, and Rum Charlie and his associates had their hands full for ten minutes.

"Your good health, gentlemen."

And the glasses were drained with a crook of the elbow.

Settling his score, the scout resumed his seat, and watched the game of cards, which had been resumed.

"I must tell yer ter look out for Iron Grip, pard, for he's ugly," said one of the players, turning to him.

"I sent him flying up the street a short while ago, for he came out as I was coming in.

"I guess he's not dangerous, but I thank you all the same," said the scout.

No one asked him more, for he seemed a man not to question closely, but all wished to know.

Presently the door opened and Room Key Johnny came in, and, seeing Buffalo Bill, took a seat near him.

Not long after the door swung back and Bunco and Fanshaw came in.

The scout saw that they were looking for him, but he merely moved so as to be ready to draw quickly, and then kept his position and an air of absorbed attention in the game.

At a quick glance Buffalo Bill took in the man with the landlord, and then he did not look at him again.

"Does yer know him?" asked Bunco, in a whisper to Fanshaw.

"No."

"Are it Buffalo Bill?"

"I never seen him, so I don't know; but he's a dandy, haint' he?"

"Yes, and dangerous."

"I is more dangerous when I'm set a-goin', pard," was the reply.

"Well, what's ter be done?"

"Why, ef he's an impostor, he's got to be called in."

"I tell you he wears the silver band."

"He didn't come by it squar', for I knows all who belongs ter ther band."

"And yet he brought me ther order thet you did."

"Thar is some false play, Bunco, and he's better dead than alive."

"If he hain't squar', yes, but how's it ter be done?"



"I'll git inter a row with him."

"You knows best."

"And kill him."

"Maybe it could be done better after he goes ter bed ter-night."

"No; I likes ther fun o' a row in public, and it will jist make me a gamecock with ther pards here ter turn up ther toes o' thet dandified chap."

"He's a gamecock himself."

"Thar's but one gamecock whose spurs I can't clip, Bunco, and that's ther cap'n."

"I is quick as lightnin' on ther draw, death on ther trigger, and I kin handle a grizzly in a rough-and-tumble, while as fer ther knife, yer hes seen me use it."

"I know you is good, Fanshaw, but so is he."

"Thet may be, but I'm better, so here's to success," and the man dashed off a drink, for he and the landlord had been standing at the bar while talking.

"Pard, j'ine me in a game o' keerds, as I wants ter play and you is not engaged, I see," and the man walked up toward Buffalo Bill, who looked up and said, quietly:

"I do not care to play to-night, thank you."

"But I does."

"Then play with some one else."

"No, I has picked you out fer a partner, and I wants yer ter play."

"Do you think because I am young and innocent you can cheat me?"

All who had seen Fanshaw approach the scout saw that he had a motive in it more than a game of cards.

They had seen the scout set upon once before, and they waited developments with interest, while the whole room now had their attention drawn to the two.

Fanshaw was a double-jointed, muscular fellow, with long, heavy arms and legs, and he looked like one who would be very hard to handle physically, while his face indicated recklessness to desperation.

The drink excited him, and he said, hotly:

"Before I touches a keerd does yer say I'd cheat?"

"If I judge by your face I think you would do anything that was mean," came the response, and still Buffalo Bill did not move from his chair.

The man dropped his hand upon his pistol, but he saw that the scout already had his weapon in his grasp, and he said:

"I asked you ter play keerds, but I hain't partic'lar, fer I'd jest as leave treat ther boys to a leetle game o' knock down."

"With bullet or fist?" was the calm query.

"With fists first, and ef you is able ter stand up arter I hes hed yer in my grip, we'll try guns, knives or what you like."

"I am no barroom bully or fighter, such as you are,

but if you wish to amuse the boys all you have to do is to lay aside your weapons and toe the scratch."

"I'll do it; here, put your weapons thar, gun fer gun," and the man laid a revolver down upon the table, and Buffalo Bill, still seated, did the same.

Then he placed his bowie knife there, and the scout followed suit.

Next his second revolver followed slowly, though he still kept his hand upon it.

Buffalo Bill instantly placed his second pistol on the table, and withdrew his hand, while he said:

"Next!"

"I hain't got no more weapons, for I hain't no armory."

"All right; I am ready for the fun."

"Git up then and come at me," and the man squared himself, fists up, in a way that showed he had been trained in the art of pugilism.

"My dear sir, you said you wished to amuse the gentlemen present, and I am willing to aid you, but you must make the attack."

"Thet's so!"

"He's right!"

"Jump on him!"

"You knock fu'st!"

Such were the cries that backed up the words of the scout, and the bully, without waiting for Buffalo Bill to rise, sprung forward and aimed a quick blow at his head.

It was parried, and so well that the man's weight aided the blow he received from the scout, and he went backward with a force that sent him over a table, chairs and several men.

It was unexpected wholly to many, it was appallingly so to Fanshaw, who never doubted that his blow would hit the target, the scout's head.

The breath was knocked out of him by the lick he received, and he picked himself up very slowly, while the crowd shouted, and Room Key Johany sung out:

"You've been kicked by a mule, too, pard."

Fanshaw panted for breath, and his face was white with fury, as he turned and rushed upon the scout, his fists up, his right arm ready for a blow that must kill.

But again was the blow parried, and at the same moment the right fist of Buffalo Bill met the face of his assailant.

The man dropped like a log his full length, and Buffalo Bill calmly stepped back, as though to go to the table for his belt of arms, when a chorus of voices cried:

"Look out! he's loaded!"

The ruffian had half-risen, and, thrusting his hand into his bootleg drew a revolver, at the same time crouching as for a spring upon his foe.

Quicker than a flash, so quick that few saw how it was done, Buffalo Bill drew from his breast a der-



inger, and its loud report drowned the crack of Fanshaw's revolver, for both weapons were discharged together.

All in a heap Fanshaw fell, a bullet in the center of his forehead, while Buffalo Bill stepped to the table and resumed his arms, saying, calmly:

"I saw that revolver in his boot, so did not lay my derringer on the table."

"Right you are!"

"We had ther fun!"

"He got it squar' atween ther eyes."

Such and many other like remarks were heard on all sides, while Buffalo Bill stepped quickly up to Bunco and said in a whisper:

"What did you let the fool attack me for?"

"Quick, take his body out, and let us get that silver circle from his wrist, for it must not be seen, or we will be ruined."

"Then you is squar' arter all," said the surprised Bunco.

"Do you think the cap'n lets every man of his band know all his business?"

"Can't he have spies?" was the evasive response.

And Bunco hastily called to Room Key Johnny to help him, and the body of the dead ruffian was borne from the saloon, while Buffalo Bill hastily departed also, refusing the many invitations to "Take su'thin', pard," and followed by the cheers of the wild crowd, who had been won over by his cool courage.

Then again and again the question was asked:

"Pards, who is he?"

But no one could answer.

## CHAPTER V.

### STRATEGY.

Bunco, the landlord of the Sinner's Rest, was in a quandary.

He had certainly believed in Buffalo Bill being connected with the mysterious members of the Silver Circle until the coming of Fanshaw put the idea out of his head.

He knew Fanshaw, and there was no doubt of him.

But then the suspicion cast upon the scout by Fanshaw caused him to doubt him.

If he was playing a part, it certainly was a bold one.

He wore the silver circle upon his wrist, and, more, he had come straight to him.

He had seemed to know of the existence of the band and their locality in the mountains, while he had brought an order in a handwriting which Bunco recognized for just the things he knew were wanted.

They had been getting along all right until the coming of Fanshaw, and then doubts crossed the mind of Bunco.

Fanshaw had said there were three men on the

track of the mystery of the Silver Circle, and that one of those men was Buffalo Bill.

He was known far and wide as the best Indian fighter on the plains, he had followed trails which redskins had given up, and he was a terror to road-agents and evildoers.

Living in the army camps, he was not often seen among the mines, and yet there were none who had not heard of him.

Fanshaw did not know him by sight, but one of his comrades did, and, recognizing him as one of the trailing trio in the mountains, he feared that the stranger might prove to be the scout.

Nor was he wrong; but then, when he saw the tall, graceful, handsome man he could not believe that it could be the renowned Buffalo Bill, and he at once began a system of bullying.

If he knew the secrets of the Silver Circle, as he deemed he did, he felt that the man before him, although he wore the silver band about his wrist, was not one of the league.

So he set to work to entrap the scout into a difficulty and kill him.

The reader has seen that the biter got bitten, and Bunco was in almost despair at what to do, when Buffalo Bill came to his side and whispered to him not to let the silver circle on the wrist of Fanshaw be seen.

This caused him to feel that Fanshaw had made a mistake, and the other words of the scout almost convinced him of it, and so he bore the body of the dead man into an empty room, Room Key Johnny aiding him.

Then the clerk was left on guard, while Bunco sought Buffalo Bill in his room.

"Say, pard, I guess that was a mistake Fanshaw made?" he said, inquiringly.

"It seems so," was the quiet reply.

"He thought at first you might be Buffalo Bill."

"Why didn't you tell him to the contrary?"

"The fact is, I didn't know."

"You might have known Buffalo Bill would never wear the silver circle."

"Thet's so, and you does."

"You see it for yourself."

"Fanshaw was too hasty."

"My idea is that he was not hasty enough on the draw," came the laconic response.

"Fact; but you hes more lightnin' than I ever seen in a man afore."

"One has to be quick, living as I do in daily danger."

"And so you is ther cap'n's spy?"

"Yes, I am a spy, and I hope no more of the band will make a mistake such as Fanshaw."

"You sh'd' hev told him who you was."

"I think not, for you told him I wore the silver circle, and he picked a quarrel with me to amuse the



crowd and win glory for himself, and I allowed him to do it.

"Had he not played false in putting his weapons on the table, I would have put my derringer there; but I saw him hold back the revolver in his boot, and when I said 'Next,' he said that was all, so I kept my little gun, and it is well I did.

"It would have been better for him had he taken his knock-down and departed, and not rushed upon sudden death as he did."

"You is right, pard."

"Did you secure the silver circle?"

"Johnny is guarding the body, ter keep folks out, and I hes sent for a file ter git it off."

"When you do I want it."

"You wants it?"

"Yes; he was my game, and I wish to take it back with me, and make my report.

"As it is, I will trouble you to get that order ready to-night, for I shall start at dawn, and it is now nearly eleven o'clock."

"The store is closed, and——"

"Open it, for I leave by sunrise"

"Pard, I don't think I can git ther things together by sun-up."

"All right; do the best you can, and procure a pack-saddle, too."

"And a horse?"

"I shall take Fanshaw's horse."

"I can find yer a finer pack animal than he'll be."

"I will take Fanshaw's horse, his weapons and all, back to the mountains," was the decided reply, and Bunco knew that his guest was in earnest.

As if to convince him, for he feared trickery, Buffalo Bill said:

"I will go out to the stable now and see that a man takes good care of the horses to-night."

"Oh, I'll see to that."

"I prefer to see to it myself," and Buffalo Bill left his room and sought the stable adjoining the Sinner's Rest.

A man was there, and he seemed sullen until a gold piece was dropped into his hand, when he brightened up.

"Which is the horse that the man from the mountains rode in to-night?" he asked.

"That white horse yonder, pardner."

"Ah, a fine-looking animal," and the scout admired his good points as the man held the lantern.

"Yes, he's all a man c'u'd want in horseflesh, but he fetched his rider to ther wrong camp this night."

"Why?"

"He's been kilt."

"Ah, yes; I see."

"Did you see ther row?"

"I killed the gentleman," was the reply.

The stableman started and gazed with admiration upon his visitor.

He had not been on duty when the scout came in, and so had not seen him.

"Waal, they say you is chained lightnin', mister," he said, earnestly.

"Well, my man, yonder is my horse, and the white animal goes with me, too, so just spend your time rubbing them down, and I'll give you the mate of the gold piece I just handed you."

"I'll do it, mister, fer I likes your style."

"And find me a pack-saddle for the white, and keep the saddle that belongs on him until it is called for."

"I'll do as you say, mister," called out the man, as Buffalo Bill returned to the hotel.

He went straight to the room where the body of the dead man was lying, and knocked.

"Yer can't come in," sung out Bunco.

"You know who I am, so let me in," said the scout.

"No; nobody kin come in here to disturb the dead," Room Key Johnny replied.

"I do not wish to disturb the dead, but I desire tout come in, for I have business with you," was the firm reply.

"I'll see you later."

"I'll see you now."

And, throwing his weight against the door, Buffalo Bill entered with a bound.

It was no use for Johnny and Bunco to drop their hands upon their revolvers, for he had them both covered, and the latter sung out:

"Why, pard, is it you?"

"Yas; we didn't know yer," echoed Johnny.

"Yer sh'u'd hev told us who yer was," Bunco had said.

Buffalo Bill smiled, closed the door and put a chair against it, while he said:

"Come, pards; you knew who it was, only you wanted to get the gold dust off the body before you let me in."

"He has considerable, has he not?"

"Yas; he has got a good load o' yaller metal, and I was going ter put it away fer ther cap'n," Bunco remarked, blandly.

"You forget that I am his heir, Bunco, and I will trouble you for that pouch of gold dust, and it shall go where it belongs."

"Waal, you knows best, pard."

And three buckskin bags of gold dust were handed over.

"And the silver circle?" said the scout.

"Yas; you've got that, Johnny."

The clerk reluctantly drew it from his capacious pocket, he having filed it from the dead man's wrist.

"Thank you," and the scout placed it in one of the buckskin bags.

"Now, Bunco, I've determined to leave at sunrise, and you must get those things ready."

"I can't do it, pard."



"Your store adjoins your hotel, your clerk is in here, for I just saw him, and he says he can fill any order, and if you refuse I shall get them elsewhere, and report to the captain why I did so."

This seemed to bring the landlord to terms, and he said, sullenly:

"Waal, ef yer must have 'em yer must, so I'll do."

"Johnny, have breakfast for me so I can get off by sunrise, and you had better call me."

"Is yer sich a sound sleeper yer can't wake up?"

"If I tell you yes, don't come in and try to rob me," and Buffalo Bill nodded good-night and went to his room.

## CHAPTER VI.

### TREACHERY.

"Well, I don't like overhauling other folks' things, but I'm doing the work of a detective now, and I must get what clews I can, for this man Bunco is connected with the Silver Circle League, I am now here, and I wish to find out just what caused the mysterious disappearance of that lady they call the Black Canary and the boy.

"It looks strange that the Don should have left his room every day she arrived, and I wish to get the bottom facts of the case, *if I can*."

So spoke Buffalo Bill when he went into his room for the night.

He arranged his things so as to be ready to make a hasty start, and then looked at the pictures on the wall, the one of Don, the Monte Man, the other of the Black Canary.

He drew the tacks out of the backs and took them out of the little frames, muttering as he glanced at the name of the maker:

"Both by the same man—I thought so."

Next he overhauled the luggage of the Don, and intended to find there something to interest him.

Then he looked at the things left by Clarice Breighton, and which were in a closet, where Bunco had placed them upon taking them from her trunk.

Here, too, he seemed to find something of interest, and, apparently satisfied, he said:

"Now, to get what sleep I can."

While the scout was making his arrangements to retire a man was seated alone in the office without.

It was Room Key Johnny, and he seemed anxious, though he expected some one, from the way he constantly watched the door.

Bunco had gone into his room some time before, and thence into his store to pack up the things that he had received called for, and Johnny, after closing the door in which lay the body of the dead man, had called up a Chinese servant and sent him off on an errand.

Soon the Chinese returned, and the clerk asked, quickly:

"Did yer see him?"

"Yes, me see him ee allee samee."

"Is he coming?"

"He comee puttee quickee."

"Now you get ter bed, and keep that yaller trap o' yourn closed, ef you is axed any questions ter-morrer."

"Me keepee trapee close tightee," and the Chinese disappeared.

"I wish he'd come," said Johnny to himself soon after, and, as he uttered the words the front door of the hotel opened and a face peered cautiously in.

"Come in, Grip," said the clerk, and in response to the invitation Iron Grip stepped into the hall.

He looked demoralized and not like the swaggering bully of a few hours before, and Johnny was struck with the change.

"Johnny," he said, in a whisper.

"Waal, Iron?"

"Whar is it?"

"What?"

"Thet which tackled me."

"In bed."

"Sart'in he ain't wakeful?"

"No, he's gone to sleep."

"I'm glad."

"Why, man, you look scared."

"I is scared, Johnny."

"At what?"

"That 'arthquake I run ag'in'."

"He's a bad one, Iron."

"Sure."

"He handled you mighty easy."

"Don't speak of it, Johnny."

"Waal, Iron, I'll tell yer I thought he was jist ther man you wanted ter tackle, and so I tuk him up to yer table and give yer ther wink ter go fer him."

"And I went fer him, didn't I, Johnny?"

"You did."

"And, Johnny, he come mighty near killin' my father's son."

"You bet."

"And when I left ther saloon, and started out on ther piazza, thar he were and he had me covered, and said git!"

"And——"

"I got, Johnny."

"You ran?"

"It seemed so ter me, Johnny."

"Did he fire at you?"

"No, but he laughed as if he were glad ter see me dust, and I dusted lively, fearin' I were goin' ter catch ther bone-yard fever."

"Waal, he cleaned out a feller here ter-night in ther same style."

"So I heerd, Johnny, and thet is why I was cau-



tious in coming, for I was afeerd ther boys would set him onter me."

"We closed up, yer knows, at twelve o'clock, and thar is no one here, so I sent ter see yer."

"Has yer got ther key o' ther bar, Johnny, fer I is awful dry?"

"Yes, I've got it, and we'll go in an' hev suthin'."

So into the bar they went, and after Johnny and his pal had "braced up" with a stiff drink, the former said:

"Do you mean to let thet feller take ther town, Jim?"

"He's got it."

"Well, does yer intend ter fight ter git it back?"

"Johnny, let me tell yer a few words o' Gospil."

"Yer knows me, an' yer lies seen me tried, when I waltzed to ther front in a style thet were charmin'; but thet man clean upset me, and he's got a grip I never thought were human possibility afore."

"He shoots as he grips, right whar he wants ter, as he did at ther pard ter-night, fer he tuk him clean atween ther eyes they tells me."

"He did; it was a beautiful shot."

"Waal, I is upshot, as I says, an' I'll hev ter leave Saw Dust, or the boys will never let up."

"Say, Iron?"

"Waal, Johnny."

"Thet is why I sent fer yer."

"Ter leave town?"

"Yes."

"You has suthin' up."

"I'll tell yer, Iron, thet feller has got plenty o' dust, and he sleeps sound."

"I has a key to his room, and we'll go in thar quiet, and you use your knife on him, while I perfects yer, if he wakes up."

"You take ther dust and git, and that will be all thar is of it, fer I'll tell ther boys I seen ther man run out as did it, and it wasn't you."

"What does yer say?"

"Whar is I ter go?"

"Make fer ther Hermit's Canyon, and hide thar ontill I brings yer a horse an' all yer needs, an' kin tell yer whar ter go, fer thar's work you kin do."

"What does yer say, Iron Grip?"

"I'll do it."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE ASSASSINS.

There was one peculiarity about the locks on the room doors at the Sinner's Rest which Room Key Johnny prided himself upon.

This was, that though the door might be locked within, and the key in the lock, he could open it.

Now Johnny confessed in his earlier days to being a locksmith, when the truth is he had proven such an

adept at the trade, he had dropped it for the "profession" of lock-breaking.

It was this little scientific knowledge on the part of Room Key Johnny which had caused him to have ten from the scenes of his youth toward the land of the setting sun, where he expected he would have to pass his old age, for with a rope cravat awaiting his neck for a murder he had committed in house-breaking, he had no desire to return to the home of his childhood.

Now Room Key Johnny had put his scientific knowledge to use in the hotel, and the result was that he could do just what he told Iron Grip, open any door from without, and do it noiselessly, too.

When, therefore, Iron Grip had decided upon carrying out the red work in hand, he was quite tremulous, and Johnny said:

"Take another drink, Grip."

This was done, and then came the words:

"Now, my knife is dull, Grip, so use yours, and mind yer, send ther blow home."

"I'll do it," said the man, and he drew his bowie and passed his finger over the edge, tenderly feeling the point also.

Now, Johnny was revengeful, and he meant to have revenge on the scout for having handled him so readily; but he was desirous that another should strike the blow.

"How's it to be done, Johnny?"

"Well, I'll turn his key in the lock with my little tools, and then shoot back ther bolt."

"Then we'll go in, and you creep up to ther bed and drive yer knife home, and I'll be right thar ter let him hev mine, ef he is able to show fight, for we mustn't use guns."

"No."

"If all is done without raisin' ther house, I'll see thet yer get off with all ther dust and sich; but if he is able ter kick up a row and alarms ther house you got out o' ther winder, and I'll pretend I jest run in to see what were up, so I'll half undress, tumble up in bed, fer yer knows I sleeps next ter ther office."

"Yas."

"Are yer ready?"

"Give me a leetle more juice ter steady my nerves."

"Don't git drunk, Grip."

"No danger, pard," and the drink was taken.

Then the two men left the bar, and after the hotel clerk had divested himself of some of his clothing and rumpled up his bed in the little box of a room adjoining the office, they stole toward the door of the scout's room.

Reaching it, Johnny set to work with some tools he had, and it was not long before the skillful burglar had opened the door, and with but the slightest sound attending his work.

Entering, all was dark within, though the starlight



through the window enabled them to see the room distinctly enough for their purpose.

They crept toward the bed, Iron Grip leading and with his right hand already raised and grasping the long, murderous knife.

Nearer and nearer they crept, scarcely daring to breathe, and then down upon the outlined form came the savage blade.

A curse escaped from the lips of Iron Grip, while against the head of each pressed a cold muzzle and stern voice said:

"Hands up, gents!"

They had not seen the tall form glide into the room after them, follow them up, and then hold them at his mercy.

The words that broke from their lips do not look well in print, but in their surprise they did not neglect to obey the stern order:

"Hands up, gents!"

"Now march!"

They obeyed, out of the door into the lighted hallway and thence to the office.

"Now, gentlemen, you will excuse me if I disarm you, and to lower a hand means death."

Then, laying one of his revolvers upon the desk, with his disengaged hand Buffalo Bill disarmed first one and then the other of the pair.

"This rope is handy," he said, with a smile, and he took a lariat down from a hook and skillfully bound the prisoners, back to back.

Then he led them to the room, wherein was the body of Fanshaw, and said:

"Sit down!"

They obeyed, and, taking another lasso, which he had found in the office, he cut it in two and bound the feet of one, tying the end to the bed on which lay the dead man.

The other's feet were likewise secured, and the rope-end made fast to a hook on the wall.

"Now, gentlemen, if you can get up from here, you will be smarter than I think; but I forgot one thing," and the scout left the room.

In a short while he returned with two sticks, a piece of blanket and some string.

These he made into gags which he forced into the mouth of each man, and, raising his sombrero with mock politeness, he said:

"I bid you adieu, pards."

Then he locked the door, for Johnny had mended the lock after its having been broken off by the scout, and, placing the key in his pocket, he went back to his room.

"I tellee rightee allee samee," said the Chinese servant, popping his head into the room as the scout was lighting his candle, and who was the same one whom Room Key Johnny had sent on the errand after Iron Grip.

"Yes, my good fellow, you did me a great service,

and, had I been a hard sleeper, and not been warned, they would have killed me."

"They muchee mad, dontee?"

"Yes, they are not happy; but here, let me make you this present, and then I wish you to go to Fort — and give this piece of paper to the officer in charge there, and he will look after you until I get back, when I will see that you are taken care of," and Buffalo Bill gave the Chinese a buckskin bag of gold and a piece of paper upon which some words were written.

"Havee brother Chinese; goodee alle samee likee me," said the Chinese, with a grin.

"All right; take him with you to the fort, and you'll both find something to do there, for I tell you again, you did the square thing by me."

"Johnny muchee frightee, dontee?"

"Oh, yes, they were both crushed at their failure, and did not utter a word.

"They think I was hiding in the room, as I would have been had you not told me to get out of the window and watch them from the rear hall.

"But dawn is near, so you had better go to bed. Hop Up, so no one will suspect you.

"Good-by, and good luck, and don't forget to go with your brother in a few days to the fort, and go by the stage coach, for here's money for your fares," and the scout thrust some more money into the hand of the Chinese, who grasped his hand warmly, and glided out of the room like a shadow.

Going to bed, Buffalo Bill removed the "dummy" of bedclothes which Iron Grip had driven his knife into, and, throwing himself down to rest, he was almost instantly asleep.

The dawn lighting up his room awakened him, and, rising, he went out into the office.

All was still there, and he knocked at the door which he knew led into the room of Bunco.

A loud knock brought the landlord to the door, and he was fully dressed, though he had evidently been lying down.

"Ho, landlord, am I to get any breakfast before I start?" he asked.

"Johnny ordered it last night fer yer, pard."

"And the things I gave you a list of?"

"Is all packed in the saddle and in ther stable."

"All right, and thank you; but do you wish to send the captain any word?"

"Waal, yer kin tell him I was all mixed up at havin' two men come here from him, instead o' ther reg'lar messenger, and I prefers he'll send in ther same old way."

"All right; I'll tell him; but strike the trail of that breakfast, if I'm to get any!"

"Johnny! oh Johnny!" yelled Bunco.

But no response came, and the landlord sought his clerk in the office.

But he was not there.



"Here, landlord; you'd better bury that poor fellow at my expense," and the scout handed Bunco some money, which he grasped with the air of a man who felt that he was grasping that which he held dearer than all else on earth.

"I'll do it, fer this will bury him fu'st-class," he said, glancing at the amount.

But Johnny could not be found, though the cook had breakfast ready, and the scout ate it with a relish.

Bunco escorted him to the stable, and asked:

"Did ther cap'n say anything to you about Buf'ler Bill, ther army scout, bein' up in the mountains along with two others?"

"They know he was there."

"Well, Fanshaw had orders for me to send a party up there after Buffalo Bill and his pard; did you hear anything about it?"

"No, for Fanshaw left after I did, you remember."

"Yas, so he did."

"If the captain sent you word to send men, you had better do it, and let me know what to tell him."

"Waal, I'll send three good fellows, fer I dasn't trust more, and they'll get away with even Buffalo Bill an' his pards, fer I know who I'll pick."

"I'll tell him, landlord," and, as his horses were ready, the white which Fanshaw had ridden bearing the pack-saddle, Buffalo Bill tossed the stableman his promised gold piece, and mounted, while he said:

"By the way, Bunco, two persons in your house tried to kill me last night, and, catching them at their little game, I tied them together, and you'll find them in the room, keeping Fanshaw's body company."

"Good-by, Bunco," and the scout rode away, just as the sun peered over the mountain-tops, while Bunco, in amazement at his last words, rushed into the hotel and to the room where the prisoners were confined with their ghastly companion, while he said:

"One is Johnny, I'll bet dust on it, fer he hain't no man ter take ther knockdown he got and not seek revenge."

"Waal, that feller are ther boss o' ther cap'n himself," and Bunco threw himself against the door to open it, and went headlong into the room.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### COWED.

When Bunco burst open the door, with such force as to go sprawling into the room, he was not alone, as he afterward wished he had been.

There were always a few very early risers in Saw Dust City, men who had been drinking deep the night before, and who sought to quench the thirst in their parched throats the next morning.

Not with water, however, for that was not an al-

leviator of thirst after strong drink, and they turned from the crystal stream that ran near their cabins with a shudder and hurried to the piazza to be the first one in when the bar should open.

There was one assistant of Rum Charley whose duty it was to be on hand for the sunrise opening of the bar, that the toppers might get their morning "bracer," and he was just coming along the hallway a trifle late, when he saw the landlord rush to the door of the room in which the body of Fanshaw had been placed.

Realizing by their feelings that the barman was late, the crowd outside, numbering some dozen, had entered the hotel to discover the cause, when in from the side entrance they saw Bunco rush with a speed they had never before seen him exhibit.

Unheeding their presence, the landlord had thrown himself against the door and gone in.

But they were close upon him, as they knew that something of importance had happened to excite Bunco in that way.

The tardy barman also entered, and, though the toppers discovered him, their curiosity just then got the better of their thirst.

Some, knowing that the dead man had been placed in that room, supposed that he had risen to life again and hailed Bunco out of a back window to come and let him out.

This was the only solution of the mystery in the minds of the toppers.

When, therefore, the door was opened, they beheld the body just where it had been placed upon the bed.

There was no life there, as a glance would show. But a glance was all they bestowed upon it, too, for their eyes were just then riveted upon a sight that almost paralyzed them.

At first they gave vent to murmurs of surprise, then to talk, and then to shouts of laughter, for the picture was a comical one to all but those who formed it.

Bunco had gotten upon his feet, and his face wore a strange look.

It was a puzzled expression, a pleased one and sad one, all combined.

He saw there his clerk, Room Key Johnny, of grand stature, of brawny arm and a terror to mankind in Saw Dust City, the bouncer of the Sinner Rest, tied hand and foot and gagged.

He saw Iron Grip, also a dreaded giant, in the same sad plight as was Johnny.

They sat upon the floor back to back, a lariat bound tightly around their waists and their hands tied firmly together.

Their feet were also bound, the rope from one being made fast to the bed upon which lay the ghastly form, that from the other being fastened to a hook in the wall.



They could not move to get up, and if they had tried to they would have tipped over on their sides and thus remained.

Their faces were black with passion and working with hatred, while in the mouth of each was a stick, wrapped around with a piece of blanket and fastened with strings at the back of the head.

So securely fastened were they that they could not force them from their mouths.

In dismay almost Bunco regarded them, and then he sprang forward, and with his knife severed the strings that held the gags.

The men breathed more freely, but they could not at first speak.

Then the ropes binding them together, their feet and their arms, were also cut, and the two men were free.

But they were stiff and wretched, and made no effort to speak.

They felt the humiliation of their position, and looked as savage as wolves.

But the crowd, now increased to over a score, enjoyed it.

Nearly all present had suffered at the hands of those two huge bullies, and it was delightful to see that some one had caused them to suffer.

"What are it, pards?" asked one.

"Durned ef I didn't think you was ther Siamese Twins," said another.

"Did ther stiff rise up and tie yer?"

"Yas, they was sittin' up with ther stiff, and his ghost jist tied 'em."

"Yer oughter hev hed yer pictur's tuk, ter show ther boys."

Such were the remarks that were heard from those present, and after each one the crowd laughed.

"What's it all about, Johnny?" asked Bunco.

But Johnny made no reply; his mouth pained him and was as dry as dust.

"Waal, I kin tell yer, pards, as they don't talk; it's ther pilgrim as was here last night as did it, fer he told me as he rid off that two gerloots in ther tavern tried to kill him, and he held a full hand and trumped thar leetle game, and I'd find 'em here, tied up."

"Ther dandy who kicked Iron Grip and slewed that feller over thar waitin' ter be planted?" asked one.

"Yas, that's ther man," and at Bunco's reply the two unfortunates groaned.

"Whar is he?" called out several.

"He hev gone home, wharever that is," cried Bunco.

"We didn't try ter kill him, and he used us foul," growled Johnny, at last finding his voice, though it was very husky.

"Yas; he come a treacherous game on us, he did,

when he war tryin' ter do him a favor," said Iron Grip.

The crowd shouted, while Bunco said:

"I sh'u'd hev thought two sich terrors as you is oughter hev got away with him."

"We was takin' a quiet leetle drink with him, and we didn't hev no weapons on, and he jist covered us with his knock-me-downs, and then, while we was unconscious, he tied us up this way."

The crowd betook themselves to the barroom, laughing at this explanation, and the two cowed desperadoes hid in a corner by themselves.

"I'm goin' after him," said Room Key Johnny.

"I sees what yer means, pard Johnny."

"Ter kill him," was the savage response.

"I'm agreeable."

"Waal, we kin do it, for both you and me is good trailers, and we kin slip up onter his camp at night and fix him with our rifles, for he's human."

"You bet, ef he don't seem it."

"He's got a good lot o' things with him, plenty o' gold dust, two horses and his weapons, and we won't git a bad haul, while, ef we kills him, we kin come here ter Saw Dust and boss ther camps."

"I'm with yer, pard," was the earnest reply, and, after hiding in their room all day, the two assassins started after nightfall on the trail of Buffalo Bill.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A PICKED TRIO.

That afternoon three men arrived in Bunco's saloon to whom the landlord showed by signs that he wanted to see them in private.

These signs were understood, for first one who had received it got up and left the room, then a second, and next the third.

Though the two first had gone out by the front door, they quickly entered the hotel, where the third was already, having entered from the saloon.

Bunco stood in his room door and beckoned to them, and as the last entered it was tightly closed behind him.

The quarters of the landlord were really comfortable; in fact, luxurious for that wild land; but he loved his ease, and he had carted over prairie and mountain the furniture that was there, besides adding many little things that one would not expect to find on the border.

"Be seated, gentlemen," he said, in his most insinuating way, but it was to save his politeness, for they had taken seats as soon as they entered, for they were not a trio to stand on ceremony, even with the landlord of Sinner's Rest.

The three were alike in one respect—that is, they were villainous in countenance.

In other respects they differed, for one was very tall and slim, but wiry as an Indian, another of me-



dium height, thick set and muscular, and the third a small man, with an air of pomposity equal to a ban-tam rooster, as though to make up in dignity what he lacked in size.

They were all dressed as miners, and there was scarcely any difference in their clothing, from the slouch hat to the top-boots and belt of arms.

Their faces differed in that one was a thorough brunette, another a perfect blond and the third red-headed and red-bearded.

They had been about the three first men in Saw Dust City, had struck a dozen good leads, and, gambling them away, had come down to almost hard-pan, as far as money was concerned.

Working together and living together in one cabin, as they did, they had gained the appellation of The Triplets, while individually they were known as Long, Short and Stumpy, from their various sizes.

"Gentlemen, I gave you a look which I am glad you took in, fer I wants ter hev a talk with yer," said Bunco in as insinuating a manner as he could assume, and he took from a cupboard a bottle of his "private stock," and placed it upon the table, with four glasses.

The Triplets smiled, for they loved liquor, as the expressive coloring of their noses indicated.

"Well, pards, I have a leetle work fer yer to do," said Bunco.

"Name it, pard."

"We is here."

"Call us."

"It will take you away from Saw Dust City for a while."

"All serene, Mister Bunco."

"We won't git homesick."

"Thar is them here as will be glad we is gone."

"It is to go up into the Rockies, which folks speaks of as ther Haunted Mountains."

The men did not change color, but made their usual triple responses, Long beginning first and Stumpy ending.

"Now, as to tarms."

"Yas; thet are of interest ter us."

"Gold dust talks."

"We is poor, Mister Bunco."

"Well, I will give you each a hundred dollars ter start with, fit yer out from ther store with what ammunition, provisions and all else yer may need, giving yer a pack-horse ter carry 'em, and when yer comes back with proof yer hev got away with three men I will give yer another hundred apiece, while yer'll get their horses and traps ter sell.

"The man yer ter kill is Buffler Bill, who jist left. He's ther leader of er band of three—the Trapper Parson, or the Mad Hermit, and a nigger—clean them out."

"We accepts the terms," cried the trio, and the next day they set out for the Haunted Mountains, armed to the teeth.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE TWO TRAILERS.

The two worthies, or rather unworthies, whom revenge had started upon the trail of Buffalo Bill rode along at a brisk pace for several hours, until they came to a trail leading off from the Overland stage track.

On the second day just before nightfall they looked over the ridge of a hill and beheld their game.

It was the scout, and he was riding leisurely along, the pack-horse close behind him.

Dismounting, the assassins watched him as he descended the hillside into the valley, and saw him, in the gathering gloom, turn to the right.

"Thar he camps, Grip."

"Yas, he's gone off ther road ter find a good place.

"You come with ther hosses, while I look ahead on foot.

"When yer gits ter whar he left ther trail, jist wait fer me," and Iron Grip set off down the hillside at a swinging pace.

The scout had been fully half a mile away when he had left the trail, and it was a distance quickly covered by the tracker.

It was too dark for him to see the trail, but he knew which way the scout had gone, and he followed with the instinct natural to one on the border.

A walk of several hundred yards, and he halted.

A glimmer on the treetops told him there was a fire ahead.

Cautiously he crept on, and soon, in one of the numerous cañons penetrating the mountainside, he discovered the game he sought.

The scout was there; he had built a fire in a crevice of the rocks, his horses were near, not yet unsaddled, but feeding upon the grass growing on the side of the cañon.

So Iron Grip hastily retreated and arrived at the trail to find Johnny there with the horses.

"Waal, Grip?"

"He's thar."

They studied the situation of the camp carefully.

The cañon ran back some hundred feet into the mountain, was about thirty feet wide, and the banks were fringed with trees, while the sides were fringed with grass.

Beyond the campfire, up the cañon, the two horses had been placed, and lariats had been stretched across just at the camp to prevent their getting out, so that they could be turned loose and fed at will.

The fire was built in a small crevice of the rocks, and to one side were the saddles, pack-saddle and



bridles, and upon the other, wrapped in his blankets, the form of the scout.

"Ef he jist hed a idee we was arter him, Grip, I'd feel narvous about thet bein' him," said Johnny.

"Thet's him, fer thar's his boots toward ther fire, and he hes his hat over his head.

"Now, we has him this time."

"And shall we open on him with our revolvers?"

"It's time ter take them when ther rifles fail; but you fire at his head right under his hat, and I'll jist send my bullet s'archin' for his heart."

"I are ready," was the answer.

The two men were not sixty feet away, and, raising their rifles together, they counted in chorus:

"One, two, three, fire!"

The reports rang out in the cañon like a hundred guns, and the form was seen to twitch violently and then remain still.

"We hes him!" yelled Johnny.

"And his gold dust," shouted Iron Grip.

Then, revolvers in hand, they rushed forward, while the two startled horses snorted wildly, as they trotted to the lariat barrier across the cañon.

But only half-a-dozen yards had the two assassins advanced when a tall form bounded down from a rocky shelf, ten feet above the fire, and instantly followed the crack of a revolver.

Iron Grip dropped in his tracks, his revolver going off as he fell, while Johnny, with a yell of terror, fell upon his knees, and, raising his hands above his head, shouted:

"My hands is up, pard! don't shoot!"

"I would serve you right to kill you, but I am no murderer, to fire on a man who begs for mercy," said Buffalo Bill, sternly, and, stepping forward, he disarmed the wretch, who trembled violently.

Then he bound him securely, his hands behind his back, and said:

"Where is your camp?"

"I'll show you, sir; indeed I will."

"Is that your only companion?" and he pointed to the dead body.

"Yas, pard; he are all."

"Wait until I pull my boots on, and I'll go with you," and the scout walked to the fire and picked up his hat from the blankets, which were wrapped about a log.

Then he put on his boots, while Johnny, hoping to curry favor, said:

"Maybe Grip hain't dead, pard, and he might rise up and kill yer."

"No danger of that, sir," was the cool reply, and, with perfect confidence in his aim, he said:

"Now to your camp."

The man led the way, and in half an hour they returned, leading the horses, and bringing their traps.

"Now, if your dead friend has any valuables with him, you can have them."

"Thank you, pard," and the body was quickly stripped of all that was valuable about it.

Next morning Johnny, stripped of his arms, was turned loose by the scout, with orders to get as fast as his legs would carry him.

Johnny obeyed. Later on in the day he met the trio—Long, Short and Stumpy—and, thirsting for revenge, joined them in their hunt for the scout.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE WARNING.

When Bunco had arranged his compact with The Triplets, he passed with them into the store by the private passageway leading from his own rooms.

"When does yer expect ter start, pards?" he said.

"To-morrer arter ther buryin'," said Long.

"Yas, we must attend ther funeral, out o' respect to ther remains."

"We never misses bein' in at buryin's," Stumpy chimed in last.

"Waal, jist say what yer wants, and I'll hev it all ready fer yer ter-night."

The order was given and The Triplets left.

"Whar's Johnny gone?" asked Red Tom, the store-keeper.

"I don't know, but I guess ter seek another camp."

"Yas; he can't live here."

"Not after ther way thet stranger handled him and Iron Grip."

"They went tergether?"

"Yes."

"Somebody's bound ter suffer."

"So they will, fer, though their spurs is clipped here, they'll put on airs where they are not known; but where is Deer-Eyes?"

"He's just gone out afore you came in, and said he was goin' ter visit Miner Mingo's fam'ly up ther valley, but I'll stop him, fer I wants his help in gittin' out these things."

Bunco left, and Red Tom called his clerk, who entered, all ready for a ride.

"Dickie, I wants yer help, so yer can't go," said Red Tom.

"But I will go, for Mrs. Mingo is sick, her husband told me so to-day, and I have some things to take her," said the youth, firmly.

"I wants yer here, Dickie."

"I cannot help it; I am going, and, as it is getting late, and some miles to the Mingo ranch, I'll start now."

"Don't you go," said the man, threateningly.

"I will," and, wheeling on his heel, the boy left the store.

His horse was all ready saddled for him in the stable, and a splendid animal he was.

Slinging a pair of saddle-bags over the saddle, the



boy tightened his belt, which contained his weapons, and shot out of the stable, just as a Chinese servant came to tell him Red Tom sent for him to come back.

At a sweeping gallop the boy sped along the valley, and his horse kept up the pace untiringly for mile after mile.

Then he halted at a stream, threw off the saddle to cool the animal's back, rubbed him down hard, and, after half an hour of rest, gave him some water, and, mounting again, set off at the same sweeping pace.

For two hours he kept it up, and then he halted once more for rest, and again devoted himself to the care of his horse, saying in a kindly tone:

"This is a hard run, Flyer, but we must make it."

It had been very late when the youth had left, almost midnight, and he had gone at a slapping pace over the level land.

Dawn broke as he mounted again, and, after a few miles' ride in the same dashing style, he came to a hill which the valley trail led up.

As he mounted it, over the rocky ground he saw going along the ridge a horseman, a led horse following.

He had already been seen by the horseman, who came to a halt as the youth waved his hat to him.

A few moments more and the youth drew up his panting horse near and said:

"I have ridden hard to overtake you, Buffalo Bill."

"Ah! and you have been successful, but are you a pony rider?" said the scout, gazing upon the handsome, flushed face of the youth.

"No, sir; I am a clerk in Red Tom's store, which is Bunco's Bonanza Palace, as you will remember, for you were in there night before last."

"Yes; and I caught a glimpse of you there, and thought that you looked out of your element; but what can I do for you, lad?"

"The shoe is on the other foot this time, sir, for I can serve you now, though once you served me."

"Your face looks familiar, but I am at a loss to recall where I have seen you before night before last."

"It does not matter; but you did me and mine a service once, and I knew you when you entered the store; but no one else in town seemed to know you, and so I said nothing."

"I am glad that you did, as it turned out, though I did not expect to hide my name when I went there; but what is it, young partner?"

"The two men whom you left tied hid in their room all day, and Hop Up, the Chinnee, heard them swear to follow you and kill you."

"He told me, and I came on to warn you, for they left last night, following your trail by the mountain road, and I started some hours after by the valley way, feeling that I could catch you."

"Bunco knows that you and two others are in the hills, trying to solve the secret of the Silver Circle."

"It was to tell Bunco this that Fanshaw, one of the mysterious band, was sent, and you killed him."

"You are playing a part, for I feel you do not belong to the band; but you deceived Bunco, and he does not know you as you are."

"So he obeyed the order sent him to send men from Saw Dust City to kill you and your two comrades, and last night Bunco put on the trail three of the most dangerous men in all this border."

"They are known as The Triplets, Long, Short and Stumpy, and they are splendid trailers, most desperate, and dead shots, while they go prepared to hunt you down."

"I have heard of those three gentlemen, and shall be glad to welcome them, now that you put me on my guard."

"But now to yourself; why do you remain in that camp?"

"I cannot help it, sir."

"If you will go with me I will see that you are taken care of."

"No, no, sir; I cannot go; I must stay there."

"But, remember, I have warned you, and the two first cannot now be far away, the others will look for you in the Haunted Mountains."

"Good-by, Buffalo Bill, and God bless you!"

The boy wheeled his horse as he spoke and rode away at a gallop, while Buffalo Bill in vain called to him to halt.

"I have half a mind to ride after him, and—— No, he was in earnest in refusing to go with me, and some day I'll go back to Saw Dust City and look him up."

"Now to destroy his trail, so those fellows will suspect nothing—ah! he has left none on these rocks that will attract their attention, so I will go on my way, for to-night, when I camp, will be their time to attack me, as they cannot get ahead, as this trail runs, to ambush me."

And so the scout rode on his way, his thoughts full of the strange, handsome boy who had given him so timely a warning of death on his track.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE CHINEE FRIENDS.

When Deer-Eye Dick left Buffalo Bill he rode rapidly on his way back the way which he had come.

His face soon wore a triumphant look, mingled with a certain recklessness that was called there by the knowledge that he had to face trouble on his return in the anger of Red Tom.

He urged his good horse onward at the highest speed he dared force him to, and held it until he reached a good place to rest.

Not thinking of his own fatigue, he bathed the



nostrils of the tired horse, and gave him another rubbing, keeping it up for a long time.

Then the animal, greatly refreshed, was allowed a drink of water, and, opening the saddle-bags, which he had wisely brought along, the youth took out a good feed of oats from them and gave them to his horse.

While the animal enjoyed his repast Deer-Eye sat down and ate his dinner from food he had brought.

This done he lay down for half-an-hour's nap, and, waking with a start, found that he had slept more than an hour.

His horse had finished his oats, rested with a wallow and was cropping grass near.

Saddling hastily, he rode on.

It was after sunset when he rode up to the stable, and the man in charge said:

"Deer-Eye, Red Tom's fightin' mad about your goin', and he said if yer didn't tarn up ter-night he'd put a dozen men out in s'arch of yer."

"I'm here to save him that trouble—— Hello, Hop Up!"

And he turned to the Chineese who had befriended Buffalo Bill and who just then confronted him.

"Tomee awfee madee, but don'tee get frightee," said Hop Up.

"No, Hop; I am not at all alarmed."

"Sha'n'tee hurtee you," added the Chineese.

And the youth went on into the store by the rear door.

A clerk was there, and he gave the cheerful information:

"Ther old man's goin' ter skin yer, Dick, fer he's mad as a wet hen."

Dick made no reply, but passed on into his own room, which was reached by going through that of Red Tom.

The storekeeper was not in, and, after a while, Dick put in an appearance at the store and let the other clerk go to supper.

Then he had his supper, and yet Red Tom did not appear.

At last he came, and his face was black with fury.

"You kin git out fer ther rest o' ther night," he said to the other clerk, who hastily departed.

Then he closed the door, and, turning to Dick, asked in a voice of suppressed passion:

"Tell me whar yer went."

"For a ride."

"Whar?"

"Among the mountain trails."

"What for?"

"I will not tell you."

The words were uttered firmly and distinctly.

"What?"

And the man looked like a wild beast about to spring upon its prey.

"I have done no wrong; I went off on a ride for a special purpose, and I will not tell you more."

"Then I'll kill yer!"

He advanced as he spoke and drew his knife from his belt.

That he was mad with fury his writhing face and flaming eyes showed.

But the boy did not move, did not drop his hand on the knife or the revolver he wore.

He looked calmly in the face of the man and said slowly:

"Kill me if you wish, for better death than such a life."

He gave a howl like a wounded wolf and sprang toward the boy; but suddenly out from behind a counter near sprang a lithe form, a knife glittered in his hand, and the blade was thrust to the hilt in the body of Red Tom.

Ere he could fall, for he was dead before the blade was withdrawn, he was caught in the arms of his slayer and dragged behind a counter.

Then came the words from the lips of the youth:

"Oh, what *have* you done?"

"Killee Redee Tomee," was the cool response of Hop Up, the Chineese.

"You have saved me from death, my poor Hop Up, but you will be killed."

"No stay and lettee Melican man killee."

"Hop Upee no foolee."

"My good friend, you do not know from what you have freed me; but I fear for you, yes, and for myself, too."

"Hop Up say comee wid he."

"He go to-nightee pretty quick to Buffalo Billee."

"He friend of Hop Up."

"What, is *he* your friend?"

"Muchee goodee friend of Hop Up."

"But you must fly now, for some one will come in soon and discover all."

"No, deadee man insidee there, and you close door for night timee."

"Hop Up brother nabee two horsee and readee now to go."

"You go wid brother and Hop Up?"

"I do not know what to do," said Dick, plaintively.

"Stopee to thinkee gettee hang up."

"True, and you shall not suffer for me, so I will close up the store and get you started."

"No go widouttee you."

"But you must."

"But wontee; stay rightee here and get killee allee samee."

Dick stood in deep meditation an instant, the Chineese coolly looking at him.

Then he said, suddenly:

"He told me to come to him if I needed a friend, and I will do so."



Going quickly to the door he was about to close it, when two miners came in to buy a few things.

With perfect calmness he got them the articles.

"Whar's ther boss, Deer-Eye?" asked one.

"He's here," was the reply.

"I wants ter see him."

"He cannot come now, so drop in to-morrow."

"All right, Deer-Eye, anything to please you," and the men departed.

Instantly the door was closed behind them, and barred.

Then the door leading into the hotel was locked, and, going into Red Tom's room, Deer-Eye tried to open a trunk that was there.

"The keys are in his belt," he said, with a shudder; but he went out into the store, where Hop Up was hastily getting together a supply of provisions, and secured the keys from the dead man's belt.

Then he unlocked the trunk, which was a very strong one, encircled by iron hoops, and took from a box some papers, which he thrust into an inner pocket of his jacket.

Then he went to his room and secured a buckskin bag of gold, and some things he wished to carry with him, after which he joined Hop Up in the store.

"Gottee plentee for allee," said the Chinese, with a smile.

"There is a pack-saddle, Hop Up, and we will load it," and he took down from a nail where it hung a large pack-saddle.

Into it were placed provisions of various kinds, ammunition and the articles which he had taken from his room.

Then some canvas cloth, rubber and woolen blankets, and then heavy overcoats were strapped onto the pack, Deer-Eye saying to the Chinese:

"Half of this store belongs to me, Hop Up, for my money Red Tom put in with Bunco on shares, and I have a right to take what I wish and it is not stealing."

"Takee allee, no stealee," was the response.

"Now we are ready, and I must go out to the stable, and get my other horse, Faithful, while I'll make the one I rode from Mingo's the pack-animal until I get there and change for Flyer."

"'Melican man callee brother Lickee Skillee; he allee ready, too, ridee horsee for Hop Up."

"All right, we'll carrv the pack out to the store stable, for no one is there."

So they took up the pack-saddle, Deer-Eye locked the door of the store, and they reached the stable without being seen by any one.

Securing his own horse, Faithful, from the Sinner's Rest stable, and the animal he had ridden from the settler's, he soon had them ready and rode away in the direction of the graveyard, while Hop Up ran off after his brother, who was none other than the cook left in charge of The Triplets' cabin, and who had not

been at all backward in amply providing himself for the trip he contemplated making, with all that he found handy in the house or stable.

While waiting for his Chinese friends Deer-Eye sat upon his horse in deep and seemingly sad meditation, for he said earnestly, as he brooded over what had happened:

"Well, I did my duty by him, as I pledged myself to do, and he brought his death upon himself.

"Dead, dead, and now I can go my way; but I would have remained and faced the consequences but for that poor Chinese.

"Still, they might have killed me, and Bunco would have robbed me of my share in the store, so let it go as it is, and what I have with me keeps me from being a beggar—— Ah! here come the Chinese."

A moment after Hop Up and Lick Skillet rode up, the latter leading two pack-horses, for which he apologized by saying:

"No comee back, takee much baggage."

"All right; it may come in well yet; but let us be off," and, leading the way, Deer-Eye set off up the valley toward the Mingo ranch, followed by his two Chinese friends, who each led a pack-horse which would have driven The Triplets raving mad had they known that their belongings comprised the contents of the packs, and how particular their Chinese cook had been to secure only the best of everything to carry with him.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE AMBUSH.

As the four men, The Triplets and Hotel Johnny, as he was also often called, rode along the trail of the scout and came near the Haunted Mountains they became very cautious.

Long, who was the best trailer, went in advance, and on foot, his horse following behind obediently.

The other two of The Triplets, Short and Stumpy, rode to either side, examining every sign, and Hotel Johnny brought up the rear with the pack-horse.

The latter realized fully the danger of his position should the scout by any means triumph.

He knew that patience might cease to be a virtue with Buffalo Bill, as far as he was concerned.

Under no other circumstances would he have dared to follow up the daring man, for revenge or gain, but that he was in company with three such men as were Long, Short and Stumpy, The Triplets.

Their reputation, and the hope of surprising the scout, gave him courage.

The fact was that, like all bullies, once their pride and power are broken, they become cowed, and where Johnny would have before fought half-a-dozen men, he was now afraid of his own shadow.

So he was content to hang back with the pack-



horse, and yet he kept a keen eye behind him, for fear of a surprise in that direction.

As for The Triplets, they were in their element.

They had committed crimes in partnership, such as murdering, running off stock, stealing horses and playing road agent, so they leagued together for protection.

Starting at early morn, they came up the valley only a couple of hours after Buffalo Bill and his companions had taken up the position in ambush.

The spot chosen by the scout seemed to be a natural ambuscade.

It fronted the cliff, on which was the strange and mystic sign of the Silver Circle, and it held the position so that one approaching the river bank, where the trail so abruptly ended, must come under the range of the rifles of the party in hiding.

The place was a pile of rocks, overgrown with stunted pines, and rising like an oasis out of the meadowland about it.

There were cañons running into it that an army wagon could pass through, and in one of these the three horses were staked out to short ropes, all ready to mount hastily, while their riders held a good position among the tree-fringed rocks forty feet above them.

For himself the scout hated an ambush, and liked to go fairly out and face a man.

But the question at stake in this case was a most serious one.

He argued that he had come here alone to see what the mystery of those everlasting hills was.

Besides, after these men had been gotten rid of there were the Silver Circle band to hunt down and capture.

"If we can wipe out The Triplets and Johnny in one clean sweep we need not fear the phantoms, for, after what you tell me, parson, I do not think we have over half a dozen, all told, to go against," the scout had said, as they waited for the coming of the trailers.

And now the trailers were in sight, coming on slowly, feeling their way, watchful, cautious, cunning, as those men well knew how to be.

The eyes of the three in ambush were upon them, and a stern smile rested upon Buffalo Bill's face, a look that was almost merciless.

Nearer and nearer they approached, Long half-a-hundred yards in front, and directly on the trail of the scout, Short a hundred feet to one side, Stumpy as many more on the other, and Hotel Johnny bringing up the rear.

They looked like army skirmishers in their cautious advance, and when Long was on foot the others were mounted.

Presently Long stopped, and his eyes were upon the pile of rocks.

His cunning eye saw at once its advantages for an ambush, and he conned it closely.

The others halted as he did.

Then he took his field-glass and scanned with the utmost patience every part of it.

Still, he seemed not satisfied, though he saw nothing of a suspicious nature.

Then he looked at the distant cliff, and its weird circle painted upon it, and examined the open space leading to the river between the cliff and the massive, impassable rocks on the right.

It seemed too open there, on either side, for an enemy to find a lurking place; but the oasis on his left he did not like.

He heard the roar of the river as it surged along, and doubtless thought that where the trail forked it there was a shallow crossing, and, still keeping his eye upon the suspicious pile of rocks on his left, he once more moved on, and his companions followed as before.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A DUEL ON HORSEBACK.

As the trail left by Buffalo Bill bent to the right, toward the open space leading to the river, the trailers followed it slowly, though each one had somehow gotten an idea of suspicion that all was not right in that pile of tree-fringed rocks on the left.

At last Long reached the steep bank of the river, and the narrow space between the steep, rocky banks on the right, and the Silver Circle cliff on the left, bringing all nearer together; the four were soon assembled upon the end of the trail, where it broke off at the river.

"Pards, no man or horse ever went over thar and lived," said Long.

"Not much, fer ther stream goes along like a drove o' Texas bronchos," Short said, while Stumpy rejoined:

"It do look like certain death to go over thar."

"Yet ther trail comes here," put in Johnny.

"Yas, and tarns back, too."

"Whar does yer see ther tarn?"

"Thet is so, ther trail comes right here and stops."

"This is ther end o' it."

"Ther scout hes committed suicide right here."

"Ef he hes rid his hosses off here inter thet stream he hev."

"Buffalo Bill hain't of a suicidin' natur, pards."

"What then?"

"Thar is some mystery here we can't git onter, any more than we kin pick up ther ends o' thet trail."

"What's ter be done?"

"Camp, and talk it over."

"This are a hard camp-ground."

"We'll find better over yonder," and Long pointed to the rocky oasis.



So they talked, each one giving his views, and all at a loss to discover the mystery.

Leading the way, Long went to the cliff, and there they stood gazing at the strange device painted upon its rocky wall.

"Pards, wait here until I takes a sarvey o' yonder bit o' rock, for it may hide a ghost, and may hide a man as kin make ghosts o' human bein's.

"Arter I has tuck a look thar, we kin go inter camp, and then we can reconnoiter pretty snug about these parts, and, more, I knows o' no better campground fer us then right over yonder among them bowlders which is piled up so permiscuous."

"Wasn't thar su'thin' said by Bunco o' a letter rock here?" asked Stumpy.

"Yas, and I'll put ther letter thar now, fer thet must be ther rock," and he pointed to a rock upon one side, which seemed to have fallen from the cliff above.

He raised it and placed beneath it the letter given him by Bunco.

Then he mounted his horse and rode toward the ambush, leaving the others watching him.

He approached with caution, his rifle ready to fire if sprung upon by any dangerous game.

Buffalo Bill, the parson and Toby watched his approach, and then the former said:

"Parson, he's but one, and it's against my feelings to fire at one man from an ambush, for it's akin to murder."

"You are right, Buffalo Bill."

"Scotch a snake anyway, Massa Bill, for dey's dangersome," said Toby.

"Well, I'll ride out and meet him, and you can remain here, both of you, and fire on the others as they come up."

"All right, Cody."

"I only wish I had ridden Comrade, my own horse, instead of Iron Grip's, as I did, and then I would be certain of catching any of them if it comes to a chase; but I don't know how the horse I have runs," and Buffalo Bill drew back from his position, scrambled down the rocks, and was soon mounted upon Iron Grip's horse, which he had ridden to give Comrade a needed rest.

Seating himself well in the saddle, and with his rifle in hand, he rode to the edge of the cañon, and suddenly dashed out.

But in the meantime the desperado had changed his position, going around, as though to circle the rocks, and make his approach from the rear.

Thus it was that the scout looked in the wrong direction for him, just where he had seen him last, while Long, with his eye hard upon the mouth of the cañon, saw him as he dashed out into the open meadow.

Instantly the desperado threw his rifle to his shoulder and fired, just as a yell of warning came

from Toby, who saw that the scout had not seen the man where he had expected, and naturally supposed he had gone in the opposite direction.

With the crack of Long's rifle, down went Buffalo Bill's horse, shot through the brain, while yells broke from the other two Triplets, as they spurred toward the scene.

With the sudden fall of his horse, Buffalo Bill in vain tried to catch himself on his feet, and, hampered as he was by his rifle, he was pinioned down by one leg under the body of the dead brute.

To extricate himself, even possessed of his giant strength, before Long was upon him, Buffalo Bill knew was impossible, and so he drew his revolver quickly and fired.

Even in the situation in which he found himself, his nerve had not deserted him, and his aim was true, for the arms of the desperado were thrown upward, the rifle dropped from his hands, and he fell heavily from his saddle.

In the meantime the parson and Toby, seeing the misfortune of their comrade, had fired a shot each at long range toward their other foes, and then hastily descended to the cañon and mounted their horses.

They dashed out in time to confront Short and Stumpy coming viciously on directly toward Buffalo Bill, who was making gigantic efforts to get out from beneath the dead body of the horse.

"Take the fat one, Toby, and, parson, you try and catch yonder fellow, for I'll look after Shorty," called out Buffalo Bill, and his revolver cracked as he spoke, while Toby had kept up a rapid fire upon Stumpy from the moment he was told to do so.

Short's horse dropped at the scout's fire, and his rider fell and rolled over and over, but he was upon his feet in an instant and rushing upon Buffalo Bill.

Together their revolvers cracked, and the weapon of Buffalo Bill fell from his left hand, with which he had fired, the bullet of the desperado having struck it squarely, and thus been checked on its way to the scout's brain, for which it was going direct.

But Short had fired his last shot, as he staggered a few feet, dropped his revolver, stumbled, recovered himself, fell to his knees, arose, drew his knife and made a supernatural effort to reach the scout.

Seeing that his foe was hard hit, Buffalo Bill did not fire again, though he had drawn his other revolver, and a moment after the brave, but wicked man sunk down within a few feet of his enemy, crying out, savagely:

"We die, Buffalo Bill, and you live."

He could say no more, and, half supporting himself on his hands, he remained thus an instant and then dropped down on his face.

In the meantime Toby had spurred directly for the third and last of The Triplets, who, though he had seen his comrades go down, was not unnerved, and



sent a bullet so close to Toby's face that it stung him.

But Toby was a good shot, too, and he wounded the desperado, breaking his right arm; but, quick as a flash, Stumpy drew a revolver in his left and returned the compliment by clipping a piece out of the soldier's shoulder.

They were now almost upon each other, and to dismount his enemy the brave black spurred his large horse directly upon the smaller animal.

With his weight added the shock was terrific, and Stumpy and his horse went down, while Toby's horse barely saved himself from a heavy fall.

Wheeling instantly, Toby sprang to the ground, and advanced upon his foe.

But, though the horse had risen, his rider remained motionless.

"Bravo, Toby! The Desperado Trio have been wiped out; but come and help me out of my scrape, for the parson has gone off after Hotel Johnny, and may need our aid."

The negro ran to the scout's assistance, and their united efforts extricated him from his most painful position.

"Ther three of 'em is dead, Massa Bill, and de parson am hot arter de man yer calls Hotel Johnny.

"Yes, Toby, and we must go after the parson, for that fellow is a snake and may play some trick of being dead and turn on him.

"He knows he rides for his life now," and Buffalo Bill sprang upon Toby's big horse, calling to him to catch Stumpy's animal and follow.

When Hotel Johnny saw that the trouble had begun, he edged down the trail, to get a fair start, if it was necessary to run for it.

Leading the pack-horse, he rode along, and yelled with delight when he saw Buffalo Bill's horse go down and pin him under him.

But he became livid as he saw Long, the best man of The Triplets, fall, and, putting spurs to his horse, he urged him on, cursing the pack-horse for not following faster.

When Short went down under the fire of the pinioned scout, and he saw the parson coming for him, Hotel Johnny felt that he had made a mistake in coming to the Haunted Mountains, and, letting go of the pack-horse, he fled for his life.

Once he glanced back, with the hope that Stumpy might redeem the day; but what he saw caused his teeth to chatter, as Toby was just riding the last of the trio down.

The parson, too, was coming on swiftly, though Hotel Johnny was delighted at seeing that his horse was the faster and gaining rapidly.

"I may yet escape, for Buffalo Bill's leg must be broke," he murmured as he sped along.

"Yes, I will escape, for night will come on, if I can

only leave them far behind, and then I'll git away, I knows I will," he whined.

"I war a fool ter come, fer I might hev know'd thet thar were no man as c'u'd kill Buffalo Bill," and the man was livid with fear.

He had no saddle, only a blanket fastened around the horse, and he urged the animal with knee, voice and spur.

The parson had not fired upon him, he was surprised to see, when he could have done so at first, as he was in good range.

And he, too, had not fired on the parson, as he now recalled, and he cursed himself for his forgetting that he really had arms.

Then, as he drew further away, he grew brayer, and bitterly reproached himself that he had not charged when Short and Stumpy had done so.

"If I hed gone then, why it would hev settled it, for if two of them went down, t'other and me c'u'd hev held ther trumps, and we'd hev been pards, and less ter divide spoils among.

"But it's too late ter talk now, and all I hes ter do is ter git, and I'm doin' it ther best I knows how."

And on he went, with the parson far behind now, and no one else in sight, so he began to congratulate himself that he had for a third time escaped from Buffalo Bill, when he rode into a cañon, through which the trail ran.

Hardly had he done so, when he uttered a yell of terror, for he saw that he had dashed into a hornet's nest, figuratively speaking, for he had run full upon three horsemen, and their attitude was hostile in the extreme toward the fugitive desperado, who, flying for his life, seemed to have come face to face with death.

## CHAPTER XV.

### WELL MET.

The three horsemen who terrified Hotel Johnny by their unexpected appearance were Deer-Eye Dick and his two Chinese friends, Hop Up and Lick Skillet. They had followed the trail of Buffalo Bill and The Triplets, and, hearing the firing, had come to a halt.

They were in a deep cañon, with sides like a stone wall, and along the base on either side a growth of stunted trees.

There were boulders here and there, too, and, after listening to the shots an instant and seeming to think they grew louder, as though coming that way, Deer-Eye fell back to a group of boulders, where the trees were a little thicker than elsewhere.

The pack-horses were quickly hitched in a safe place, the Chinese were left in charge and Deer-Eye rode forth upon a reconnoissance.

He reached the mouth of the cañon and halted,



for he saw far in the distance a horseman approaching at full speed.

He knew that he must come through the cañon, so, wheeling, he rode back at a gallop.

It was not the scout, he had seen at a glance, but he had not recognized just who it was.

"We will head that fellow off, for I believe The Triplets have attacked the scout and he has sent them flying," he said to his two comrades.

"Allee lightee, we headee off," was the complacent rejoinder, and they smiled as if it was already done.

Seated on their horses they waited, and to their ears came the rattle of flying hoofs.

A few moments more and there dashed into sight a bareback horse and rider.

"Bad 'Melican man!" cried Lick Skillet.

"Muchee bad Johnnee," echoed Hop Up, who recognized him at a glance.

"Yes, it is Room Key Johnny, and he looks as though he had seen a ghost.

"I was in hopes that Buffalo Bill had killed him; but we must stop him."

Out from behind the bowlders spurred the three, and then it was that Hotel Johnny gave a yell of terror undisguised.

He tried to dodge by on the other side of the cañon, but saw that he was headed off.

He started to turn back, but the clatter of hoofs behind him stopped that intention in short order.

Then he grew desperate, drew a revolver in each hand, and, in his fright, began to fire at random.

Deer-Eye raised his revolver, but dropped his hand again, saying:

"No, no!"

But if any conscientious scruples disturbed him about firing upon the desperado, the Chinese were not troubled that way, for Lick Skillet, a skillful thrower of the lasso, sent the rope flying through the air, while Hop Up at the same time opened fire.

The result was a natural coincidence, for the noose of Lick Skillet's lariat settled over the head of the flying horse, upon which the Chinese had a business eye, while the bullet from Hop Up's revolver perforated the body of the unfortunate wretch.

"I catchee hossee!" yelled Lick Skillet, with delight, as he brought the animal to his knees, while over his head went the desperado.

"Me killee 'Melican man," shouted Hop Up, with equal enjoyment, as he saw that Hotel Johnny did not rise.

"Oh! what a life this is," sadly said Deer-Eye, as he rode toward them, and asked, quickly:

"Is he dead?"

"Heapee dead."

"Goodee hossee, badee 'Melican man," were the responses he received.

A moment more and the Hermit Trapper dashed

into the cañon, and at sight of them he drew rein and brought his rifle round ready for use.

But when Buffalo Bill arrived on the scene a few moments later, he recognized the newcomers, and bade them join his forces.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE CAPTIVES.

Several days passed away while the party rested. But at length all were ready, and the cavalcade started out for the hiding-place of the Clan of the Silver Circle.

Their guide was a magnificent white horse, which the great scout rode. It had been used by the bandits to send messages to and carry supplies from Saw Dust City. It, in company with a dog, was trained to make the journey there and back alone. But Buffalo Bill had captured the Dumb Pard. He had let the horse at the cabin of the Trapper Parson while he paid his visit to Saw Dust City, but now he mounted it again.

"Show us the way to the bandits' hiding-place," he said, slapping its flank, and the little army, led by Buffalo Bill, started.

Up to the base of a mountain range they went, and here the leading horse half-turned one way, then paused, turned back and went toward a break in the range, as Buffalo Bill could see by the indentation in the treetops.

He was somewhat surprised at the action of the horse, but allowed him to have his way, while he muttered:

"There are two trails, and he was at a loss which to take."

So on the horse went toward the mouth of the cañon, and was going into it when Buffalo Bill drew him to a halt, and, dismounting, hitched him to a tree, determined to go on foot, as he felt that he was getting into a dangerous neighborhood.

He discovered, after a short walk, that the cañon opened like a huge gateway, crags towering on either side standing for posts.

It was scarcely more than sixty feet wide, and the tops of the sides were heavily wooded.

Like walls the sides arose fully a hundred feet growing higher as they went toward the top of the mountain range.

Entering it with caution, and keeping on one side he passed along for some distance, the cañon narrowing as he did so, until it became a mere chasm between walls hundreds of feet in height.

The scout paused, for the moonlight showed him that the chasm passed into a large cañon, or valle beyond.

"If there is a guard he will be here," said Buffalo Bill, and he walked slowly up toward the chasm.



As he did so he saw the glimmer of a light upon the rocky wall.

This was a warning for him to go ahead with the greatest caution.

Approaching in a noiseless manner, he soon saw that the light shone out of an open door of a cabin or hut.

The cabin he approached was a snug little home of three rooms, with little beds of wild flowers about it, an arborlike piazza along the front and an air over all that the occupants wished to make the best of a bad situation.

Giving a gentle knock at the door, the scout heard a voice within answer:

"Who is there?"

"A friend."

"I know no friend here."

"I am a friend, and I do not care to have it known that I am here."

"Pard," and a voice from another room spoke, "we don't receive no visitors at night."

"Uncle Sol, did you ever hear of Buffalo Bill?" asked the scout, feeling assured that the last speaker was the boy guide.

"I has, and who hasn't?"

"Well, I am Buffalo Bill, and I have come here to rescue you from the Silver Circle League after your two years of imprisonment."

"Glory!"

"Thank God!"

The first exclamation came from the room in which was Uncle Sol, the captive boy, at a window, and the next from the door where the woman stood.

"Dress yourselves quickly, and I have the key, for I took it from the guard, who is now bound securely in his cabin."

A hasty toilet was made by the woman, and she said:

"Come in."

She had lighted a candle, and the scout unlocked the door and stepped in.

Handsome, sad-faced, yet stern, she looked, and she gazed earnestly upon the splendid-looking man who entered.

"You are Buffalo Bill," she said, earnestly.

"Yes."

"And you is for a fact, for I seen yer once."

And Sol entered, having grown considerably in the two years since he was kidnaped.

"And you have come to rescue us?"

"Yes, madam, and have been in the valley some time trying to find this secret retreat."

"In a word, I found here an old trapper parson, whose grandchild had been stolen from him by Don, the Monte Man——"

"That man?" cried the woman, anxiously.

"Yes, and he brought her here."

"He had slain her father, procured a map of a gold

mine he had found here, and so he came here to work it, organizing a band to help him.

"What he is to you I know, as I do that his name is Carter Creighton, and that, when you visited Saw Dust City in search of him, he fled, and more, he had you and this brave boy kidnaped and brought here."

"And he is here?" she asked, in a voice full of amazement.

"He is chief of the Gold Hunters' League, and not a mile from you, and has been for two years."

"I felt that I owed our capture to him, and was to be kept out of the way, but I supposed he was far from here."

"On the contrary he has kept you near him."

"We will meet now," she said, with a dangerous gleam in her eyes.

"It is my intention to come for you to-morrow night, so be prepared to start at a moment's notice."

"I shall come soon after nightfall, and have horses for you both."

"Why not to-night?" she said, dejectedly.

"I will tell you."

"I am alone to-night, and must return to my friends down in the valley below."

"I shall bring them with me to-morrow night, and you shall be rescued quietly, and go with one of our party to a place of safety."

"Then I shall move against the Silver Circles, going to their camp through the tunnel under the mountain."

"Can you go that way?"

"Yes; it runs through to the other valley, beyond yonder range."

"If we had but known it."

"It would have only been your death, for, on foot, unarmed and without food, you would soon have been dragged down by wolves."

"Yes, that is true, and these mountains seem full of terrible beasts."

"I shall ask you, Sol, to join our party in an attack, for I have but four others I can call, and we will have to fight half-a-dozen desperate men."

"Now you is iist layin' out a picnic fer me, Mister Bill," said Sol, with enthusiasm, and the scout felt that the boy would enjoy the fight to his heart's content.

"Now I must leave you, but be ready by to-morrow night, and all will be well."

"Good-night."

"One moment, sir," said the woman, as the scout turned to go.

"Let me tell you in a few words that I know all the black history of Carter Creighton, and you must not kill him, for brave men die in battle."

"Keep him for the hangman's rope."

"He was in love with his fair cousin, Nellie Creighton, but she loved Roy Ripley, a charity student, but who was a noble, splendid man."



"She was an heiress, and she was discarded for marrying Ripley, and then they came West and joined his father, a clergyman, who had hidden himself upon the border and gone to trapping.

"Carter Creighton sought to marry his cousin, and get her money, when he was already *my husband*."

"He thought that he had killed me, for one night, while we were hastening home along the beach, as a storm was coming up, he dealt me a stunning blow, bound me hand and foot, and put me in a frail skiff, shoving it off from the shore.

"The storm broke in fury, and, but for an accident, that he had by chance gotten hold of a lifeboat, I would have been lost.

"I was blown out to sea and picked up by a vessel bound around the Horn to China.

"It was nearly ten months before I set foot on land, and then in a foreign country.

"The captain was kind to me, but he was poor, and, finding I could do nothing as a woman, I cut off my hair, donned male attire, and went before the mast as a cabin boy.

"It was years before I could work my way back to America, going from vessel to vessel, but at last I did so, and I found my parents dead, and Carter Creighton had my inheritance.

"They had believed me dead, and had willed the property to him, after which I discovered that he had caused their death to get it.

"Suspected of it, he had fled, and, keeping the secret that I was alive, I determined upon revenge.

"Then I set out to find the man who had so wronged me.

"I am possessed of a wonderful voice, and I took that as a means to pay my way, singing from place to place, and really making money.

"At last, after long years of search, I heard of a man in the mines, a gambler, whom I believed to be Carter Creighton.

"I at once began to go the rounds of the camps, and found him at Saw Dust City, or rather was put in the room he had occupied there, for he fled that very day, and I am confident he saw and recognized me.

"I got this youth to be my guide, and we started to search through the camps, and had I found him, I was so revengeful, that I had determined to proclaim my wrongs, and I knew those rude, but good-hearted men would quickly bring him to justice by lynch law.

"He captured me, and has held me here since."

Buffalo Bill bade adieu to the woman, telling her he would return the following evening, and the band of outlaw hunters started on again.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### CONCLUSION.

Thanks to the directions of Sol, the captive boy, Carter Creighton and the five men of his band who still remained were easily captured that night and a little later turned over to the military authorities. They all suffered death as the punishment for their crimes.

The night after their arrival at the fort, Deer-Eye had ridden off alone, leaving a note for the scout that he was sorry to part thus, but that his life had been an unhappy one, and he meant to go far away to dwell where he was wholly unknown.

It was a sad letter for all, as Deer-Eye had won the great regard of all.

The Trapper Parson determined to set out at once for the East, where he had sent his daughter, to get for her the fortune she had inherited, and at their earnest entreaty Clarice Creighton went along as a governess for the young girl.

As for Sol, Old Nick's Kid, he decided to turn guide and scout, so placed himself under the tuition of Buffalo Bill, who found in him a most promising pupil, and one who, he felt assured, would win fame in the future.

Nor was the scout mistaken, for he became famous as the Boy Guide.

Hop Up and Lick Skillet proved a bonanza for the fort, the former becoming the man-of-all-work for the commandant, while the latter was taken for the officers' mess, their names having been respectively changed to Whoop-em-Up-Johnny and Tea-Kettle Tommie.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 56, will contain "Buffalo Bill's Mascot; or, The Mystery of Death Valley." A thrilling story, boys. There were more mysteries in the Haunted Mountains than one, and before he had left them Buffalo Bill had embarked on another weird adventure. Look out for it in next week's issue.





# THRILLING ADVENTURE



Come along, boys! Keep up with the procession. The entries are being shoved in on us so quick that it's no cinch counting them. The more the merrier. Remember, everybody has a chance. Just look at the list of prizes on page 31. When you see that you'll get in the contest if you're not in it already.

## A Burglar.

(By B. Franklyn Foley, Washington, D. C.)

We live in the beautiful city of Washington, in the southwest section of the city. In the rear of our home is a beautiful common overgrown with trees and beautiful shrubbery, making it a regular Eden. On last Thursday I was seated in the dining-room with my parents and brothers listening to father read the papers. I heard him read of a burglar who had broken into a person's house and had nearly killed one of the family. Somehow, I could not get the thought of burglars out of my mind. At last, bedtime came and after prayers we went to bed. Still thinking of the burglar, I and my little brother undressed and climbed into bed. We lay awake about an hour talking what we would do if the bad man broke into our house. How long I had been asleep I don't know, but I awoke with a start. Yes, I was sure some one was at my door now and then heavy knocks were heard, and I thought that the door would fall in broken from its hinges. I heard my little brother snoring. I felt my hair begin to stand up. I could not cry out. My only thought was of my little brother. I had often protected him when bad boys would tease or molest him.

I crept out of bed. My legs felt as stiff as if I was on stilts. I could only drag my feet along the floor. Over near the wall my feet struck something. I knew what it was. It was one of my big brother's Indian clubs. I grabbed it and went back to the foot of the bed with one hand on the bed and the other holding the club. I waited. All at once I heard a terrible struggle and heard my mother say to my big brother, "Mind, George, don't let him hurt you," and then I heard some one fall down the stairs bump, bump, bump!

Then I heard father say, "Hold him till I get down." I heard father when he ran downstairs, and heard the scuffle all along the hall. Then all was quiet. I heard father halloo up to ma, "I believe he is dead." I knew no more. When I came to the doctor was bending over me, and my parents and brothers were all around the

room. I heard the doctor say, "He is all right now." I fell asleep and did not wake until late next morning, and who do you think was the burglar? Why, Johnny Jones' pet billy goat. Pa had left the basement door open and Mr. Billy walked in and upstairs and tackled my door. I guess he wanted a bed. Anyway he did not suffer much from his fall downstairs. Ma says I am a brave boy.

## On the Monongahela.

(By Ralph Parray, Pa.)

In 1898 my playmate and I went down to the Monongahela River in Pittsburg, where we lived. We went out on the coal barges and I took a misstep and fell into the river. I could not swim. I shouted to my playmate, but he was too frightened to come to my assistance. I went down under the water twice and then seeing my danger caught hold of a log of wood. My playmate helped me ashore. I went home through the back streets with a pack of fellows shouting at my heels. Not very long ago, my playmate was drowned in the same river.

## On a Hunting Trip.

(By A. Jackson, Alabama.)

I was visiting my brother in north Alabama. My brother asked me if I would like to go on a hunting trip. "Yes," I replied, "it's a wonder we didn't think of this before."

We gathered up our wagon and horse and started on Friday morning. We went to what is known as Long Ridge. We left our wagon there, took our horse, grub, blankets and rifles with us.

We struck the wide hollow, took a little path which led us over the cliff, which was a dangerous place. We made it down the cliff after some time. Crossed the creek, went through the dark thicket for three miles. I felt very lonesome, but didn't say anything about it. We arrived at the old camp ground at two o'clock p. m.,



on the same day. We built a fire, and I went out some distance away from the camp to see if I could find some small game.

The first thing that I saw was a squirrel. I took my rifle from my shoulder and fired. Down came the squirrel. I took him to camp and dressed it. Then I took from the basket some bread while my brother cooked the squirrel.

By this time our camp was looking very booming and I was better contented than when we were coming through the dark thicket. As night was coming on we lay down to sleep. We were aroused at one o'clock in the morning by our horse breaking loose. We caught our horse and went to sleep again. As morning came on we went out from camp we saw a large bear creeping upon us. We fired our gun and wounded him. Then we started to the bear. He sprang at us with such force that we were compelled to use our knives.

We used our knives with such good advantage that we killed the bear. We took the bear to camp. That evening we started back to our wagon, got there all right, and arrived at home some time in the night. A few days later I took a train for Adamsville.

### Overboard!

(By Eddie Plummer, Wash.)

One Sunday afternoon as I was walking down the street, a thought came in my mind that it would be a nice thing to go down to the bay and watch the boys go in swimming, so I went down to the wharf, and as I was crossing the railroad track I saw a train coming, so I thought that I would wait until it got past, and I commenced to walk backward and I walked off the wharf.

It was high tide then, so down I plunged in the water and there was a barge scow where I fell in and I came about a foot from hitting it with my head. It happened that two men saw me when I fell in, so they ran down on the beach and one of them handed me a stick and pulled me out.

### A Runaway.

(By Tipton Pawley, Mo.)

One day while walking down Main street with a friend, the cry was given:

"A runaway!"

Looking up the street, we saw coming at a furious pace two powerful bay horses, on the seat sat a tiny swaying form.

He looked as if he might be six or seven years old. He held the lines in one of his tiny hands; his other grasped the seat.

Out in the road stood two men, one a burly policeman, the other a stylish young man, a bright, honest face and a graceful form. As the horses neared them he said to the policeman.

"Better move out of my way, and leave the horses to me."

"You?" sneered the policeman, "you could not hold a kitten."

The young man smiled, but made no answer. He walked a few yards behind the policeman. As the horses neared the first man the crowd hold their breath

so intent are they. Hemming them in without noticing it.

"Look! look! He is dragged! he is down!" Then the crowd scatters. As the horses bear down on the young man he runs the way they are running, swerves in, catches them by the bridle and soon stops them. The way they got away was through the carelessness of the boy's father who went into a store, leaving the horses unhitched.

### An Alligator Tale.

(By Newdie Tilton, Louisiana.)

A friend of mine by the name of Bill Childris and I went hunting one Sunday morning in the swamps right back of the city. We had borrowed a flatboat from a nigger hunter the day before. I had a shotgun that I got for Christmas, and Bill had a six-shooter belonging to his father.

We had gone about a mile and a half back when we heard a great splashing in the water, and when we looked we were horrified to see a big alligator falling off of a log.

I was paddling the boat at the time and dropping the paddle I seized my gun and shot both barrels at him and Bill shot three times. Then we both jumped in a tree. The alligator swam around the boat once or twice. He swung his tail around and knocked the side out of the boat. We stayed in one position so long that our legs were stiff.

At about six o'clock a moose hunter came along and we called to him and he took us out of the swamps, and we were mighty glad that he came along, for if he had not we would have had to spend a night in the swamps.

### Struck by an Engine.

(By Marshall Coursen, Ohio.)

My brother and I drove a milk wagon for father. One morning while crossing the "Nickel Plate" tracks, we were struck by an engine and thrown about twenty feet and the wagon was broken all to pieces.

Pieces of the wagon were found sixty feet from the track. The horses escaped serious injury, a thing that no one seems to understand. People who saw the accident say it was miraculous how we escaped death or serious injury.

We had a few slight scratches to show for our thrilling adventure.

### Shipwrecked.

(By Carl Ahlstrom, Jr.)

One morning I got up very early to go fishing. After eating a hasty breakfast of bread and milk, I went down to the boathouse, and put my fishing tackle and bait into the skiff that I used for gunning and fishing. The sky was very dark and a light rain was falling. It was just the day that a fisherman likes. I pulled out a mile into the stream and threw my lines overboard and then began to fish in earnest. The sport was so lively that I did not notice a squall coming up in the southeast. I was warned by the pitching of the boat to start for



home. When I got half way back I felt a sudden bump and back I fell with a loud crash into the bottom of the boat. I had run into a half-sunken snag, which are very numerous in that part of the river.

I never saw so many stars and comets in all my life. When I had gathered my scattered wits I sat up and looked around. In the bow of the boat was a hole large enough to put your head through. I stuffed my coat in it and started pulling rapidly for the shore. The water came through the cloth, and in a short time it was within three inches of the gunwale. I saw that it was no use to row any longer, so I drew in my oars and watched the movements of some men on the boathouse dock. I began to shout with all my strength to attract their attention. They apparently heard me, and I saw two of them put out in a boat and pull toward me. I slipped over the side of the sunken skiff and struck out for the shore. The wind blew the water off the top of the waves in fine spray, nearly blinding me. I felt myself rapidly sinking, and letting out one last despairing yell I sank for the first time. When I came up I felt someone trying to grab my hair, and then all was blank.

When I came to I found myself lying in bed. I was so weak that I could not stand up, but after eating a hearty meal and sleeping eleven hours, I felt none the worse after my perilous adventure.

### Down a Sewer.

(By Raymon Corris, N. J.)

One day while we were playing ball, it was my turn at the bat, and when I knocked the ball instead of going where I expected it to go, it went straight into the sewer.

Then there was an argument as to who would go and get it, and they all said that it was I who knocked it there and I ought to get it.

Well, I thought that was fair enough, so I said if two boys would hold me I would try and get it. They agreed to that. But instead of holding me they began to fool, and I slipped from their grasp and went headfirst into the sewer. I will never forget the feelings that came over me that awful moment. Every wrong that I ever did came to my mind.

Then suddenly I felt myself being drawn up and that was the last I knew till I found myself home, and they told me that someone had pulled me out with a rake. That was the narrowest escape I ever had, and I hope it will be the last.

### Off a Flying Train.

(By Charles Cooper, Illinois.)

It was a summer night last summer I took a bum. I was on a passenger train at night. All went well till I got down near Mounds, Ill., when, within about a mile from said place, I was either knocked or fell off the train. That was about eleven o'clock at night.

I knew nothing more till about five-thirty next morning. My head was skinned on one side. It soon got well, but I still carry a scar and always will to the grave.



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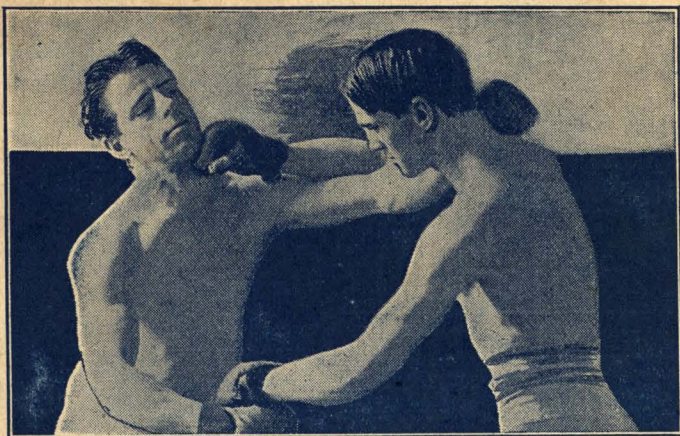
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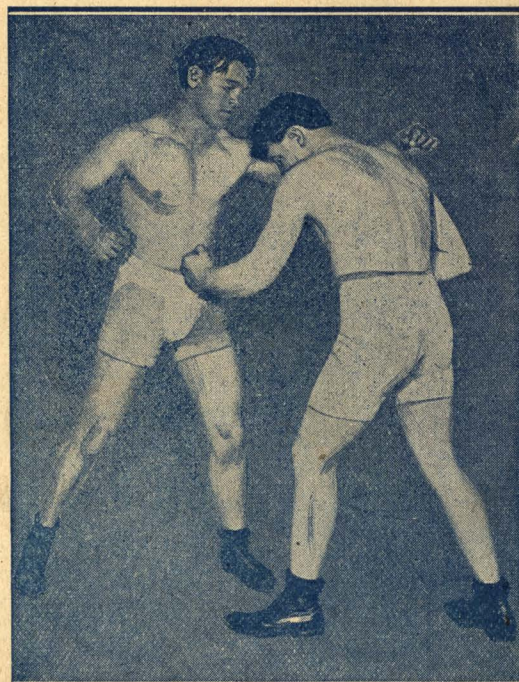
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